

LITERACIES AND ENGAGEMENT: INCORPORATING YUP'IK LITERACIES IN A LANGUAGE
ARTS CLASSROOM

By

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Abstract

The use of culturally relevant teaching practices and local literacies has been shown to increase student engagement in other studies. To observe the impact of Yup'ik literacies on student engagement, I designed and implemented a teacher, action research study that asked students to create a *yuraq* song to demonstrate their mastery of this topic. I spoke with members of the community to ensure the study was culturally acceptable and seen as beneficial, as well as to gain understanding about *yuraq* because I am an outsider to the culture. Students were observed and recorded throughout eight class periods while writing an academic essay and creating a *yuraq* song. Their actions in the classroom were analyzed to create an operational definition of engagement from a Yup'ik perspective, which was used, in conjunction with discussions with community members and students as well as student journals to determine if the *yuraq* task was able to foster deep, meaningful engagement. Their actions were also analyzed using James Paul Gee's work on "Big D" Discourse to identify the impact a local literacy had on their school Discourse. The data were able to illuminate a clear definition of Yup'ik engagement consisting of collaboration, physical action, and intense listening; deep student engagement similar to concept of Csikszentmihalyi's *flow* was observed in some but not all students; and the use of Discourse that matched the task and setting, but did not attempt to alter the power structure of the dominant Discourse in the school. The findings held a large degree of local validity for the participants, and were used to adjust teaching strategies to benefit this class.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Engagement is the visible outcome of motivation, the natural capacity to direct energy in the pursuit of a goal” (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995, p. 17).

Student engagement in the learning process is arguably the most important aspect of teaching. No matter how much content a teacher knows, or how much the teacher cares about his or her students, if students are not motivated to learn, they will not be successful. Increasing students’ motivation to be engaged in their own learning process can, at times, feel like an impossible task for some teachers. There are many factors that drive student engagement, and trying to determine which factors are impacting which students is a difficult task. While there are no silver bullets to increase student engagement, the use of culturally relevant teaching practices has been shown to help Indigenous students find more relevance in their school-based education.

Statement of Focus

Based on my observations as a classroom teacher for the past eight years, I believe one of the largest factors impacting my students is a lack of engagement in the schooling process. I also believe that students perceive discontinuity between their cultural knowledge and the knowledge they are being taught in school, which perpetuates this disengagement with school. The integration of local literacies into the classroom can serve as a means to bridge this cultural gap between home and school.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) conducted studies looking at the affects of engagement on a variety of people in many situations. He describes the relationship he found between happiness and engagement as *flow*. This feeling of *flow* occurs, “when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and

worthwhile” (p. 3). This is precisely the feeling I wish to elicit in my students when they are working in class, which leads me to look for ways to increase my students’ perception that school is not just difficult, but meaningful as well.

Research Questions

The desire to see greater student engagement in my classroom, which I believe will lead to greater academic growth is one of the core beliefs that drove my desire to conduct this study. I believe that students can be nurtured to value their education and engage in the educational process if shown that schools value them and their cultural backgrounds. These beliefs drove the research questions this study was attempting to answer:

1. How does engagement for Yup’ik students manifest itself in a 10th grade language arts classroom, and what do Yup’ik students believe engagement looks like?
2. What impact does the integration of local literacies have on student engagement?
3. Does the integration of local literacies impact the Discourse divide between home and school?

Rationale

Indigenous knowledge and culture has been marginalized by dominant, colonial, White cultures for the past 500 years (Brayboy, Gough, Leonard, Roehl II, & Solyom, 2012; Patel, 2014; Smith, 2012) leading to educational institutions in which Indigenous students are taught and assessed using Eurocentric teaching practices in lieu of Indigenous pedagogical methods (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 1998; Kawagley, 2006). Alaska Natives attempted to address the lack of Indigenous culture, knowledge, and pedagogy in schools

by creating the *Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools* in 1998. These standards were designed to offer educators, administrators, school districts, and community members suggestions on how to incorporate cultural relevancy into schools' curricula throughout the state. However, these standards were not formally adopted by the Department of Education & Early Development until 2010 (*Guide to implementing the Alaska cultural standards for educators*, 2012).

This twelve-year gap between conception, publication, and government approval allowed for another decade of Indigenous students to receive an education that may not have reflected their cultural backgrounds. As an educator for seven years in the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD), I do not recall many professional development trainings in which these cultural standards were thoroughly addressed, and the curricula maps at the middle and high school levels do not appear to contain many instances in which Indigenous pedagogical approaches are required to deliver the content. This is not to say that cultural values are not important to LKSD, or that cultural knowledge is not appreciated or encouraged in the schools as evidenced by the success of Ayaprun Elitnaurvik and the dual language (DL) program being implemented district-wide.

In an attempt to better integrate Yup'ik knowledge into the classrooms, LKSD has worked for at least the past thirty years to create culturally relevant, integrated curricular units for reading and writing (Siekmann et al., 2013) to be taught in the elementary grades. In response to a parent initiative a K-6, Yup'ik, immersion school, Ayaprun Elitnaurvik, which utilizes Yugtun as the language of instruction for all subject (Siekmann et al., 2013; Williams & Rearden, 2006) was established in Bethel. This school has been successful in helping students gain strong language skills in both Yugtun and English, and strong cultural

knowledge of the Yup'ik heritage. In 2009, LKSD adopted the Gomez and Gomez dual language model for many of its village schools.

The current Yugtun language arts curriculum for elementary in the DL program began, in part, as a translation of an English curriculum used in the district, which has the potential to limit the cultural relevancy of the content, even though it is being taught in Yugtun. However, LKSD is still working to refine this curriculum, which will likely increase its effectiveness at both teaching language and culture. The complete integration of cultural knowledge with academic knowledge is required for the curriculum to produce culturally relevant teaching where the culture does not get pushed to the margins (Hermes, 2007; Kawagley, 2006; Siekmann et al., 2013).

Not all schools in the district have adopted the DL model at this point, including the school where this study was conducted. Students at this school receive their instruction in English throughout their K-12 experience with the exception of their one designated Yup'ik language class. While some teachers in this school and across the district embed cultural knowledge and values in their classrooms, the curricula used in these classrooms are not structured using traditional Yup'ik literacies or pedagogies for the middle and high school grade levels.

Even with the successes that LKSD has gained by creating curricula for the elementary grades, there are still very little culturally relevant materials or focus at the high school level. If all of the efforts LKSD puts into culturally relevant curricula are successful in producing bilingual and bicultural students, those students who began school before these programs were initiated, but have years to go until graduation will continue to struggle without further efforts directed toward their needs. While this select group of

students who have missed out on a dual language elementary education is closing in on graduation, it is important to recognize that the gains earned in the primary grades with dual language, while still benefiting students as they progress through school, need to be supported by a continuation of culturally relevant practices at the middle and high school levels.

In addition to the push towards dual language, many schools in the Lower Kuskokwim School District have one week per school year designated as culture week. This is a time at our site when students are not engaged in the rigors of their scholastic work, but instead have the opportunity to engage in the rigors of creating cultural art or tools, listening to Elders tell stories, and practicing cultural skills. While this week seems like a great opportunity for Indigenous students, Kawagley (1999) and Hermes (2007) indicate that exposure to cultural arts and crafts is not enough to ensure a culturally relevant education. For many of our high school students, culture week and two credits of Yugtun are the only opportunities for culturally based instruction in their last four years of school. Opportunities to integrate cultural knowledge, values, and teaching methods must be considered in order to ensure schools are not simply writing off the older students with an education that is culturally and academically disconnected.

The students I teach are not often provided with opportunities to learn with Yup'ik pedagogical practices in the school setting, which creates a situation where they tend to view Yup'ik learning and school learning as mutually exclusive with each set of knowledge only beneficial in specific circumstances (Hermes, 2007). Teaching that follows the Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools can possibly help students see more value in education. Research has shown that students with higher levels of engagement perform at

higher levels in the classroom (Marks, 2000; Marzano, 2007; Shearman, Rylands, & Coady, 2012; Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990). Crumpton and Gregory (2011) highlight the need for academic relevancy to foster engagement in low-achieving students, while Paris (2012) addresses the need for pedagogy that goes beyond relevance into the role of sustaining the culture. If student disengagement stems from a lack of connection to curriculum, a culturally sustaining approach to education can ignite students to engage more deeply in their education.

Through culturally relevant or sustaining pedagogical approaches, students can possibly enter what Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 1997) calls *flow*. It is in this state of optimal efficiency and performance that people lose themselves in the task at hand. If teachers can foster an environment where *flow* is possible, students will naturally engage themselves completely in the learning activity, and may find enjoyment in the tasks as well.

A lack of relevant content and pedagogy seems to foster students who simply do what is necessary to pass, rather than commit themselves to engage in their schooling in a meaningful way. We force students to compartmentalize what is learned in school and how it is learned, while ignoring essential critical thinking skills required for activities both inside and outside of the classroom. As educators, we often neglect the carefully thought-out cultural standards by teaching with Eurocentric pedagogy. I believe an inquiry concerning the incorporation of Yup'ik literacies into my instructional practice, and a close look at the resultant levels of student engagement can shed light on ways to engage my students more fully in their schooling.

Chapter 2: Theory and Literature

Theoretical Framework

“Culture provides the tools to pursue the search for meaning and to convey our understanding to others and thereby has strong shaping influences on the communication styles prominent among different ethnic groups and their children” (Gay, 2010, p. 76). This notion of culture as a tool for communication is evident in the theoretical framework of Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT), which supports this research study on the incorporation of Indigenous literacy practices into a Western school. CRT, rooted in the work of Ladson-Billings (1995b) and Brayboy (2005), espouses the necessity for culturally specific practices to be integrated into the classroom. This theory allows for a study that looks at the way in which pedagogical techniques impact the level of engagement students have in school and school-based tasks.

At its core, CRT is the practice of educating students through their own cultural lens with the intention of minimizing the incongruity between the culture of the school and the culture of the home (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Gay, 2002, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995b, 1998). This pedagogical philosophy, while only being named in the past twenty years, was recognized over 35 years ago as a major contributing factor to the struggles underserved students faced in school. Early studies like Deyhle (1986); Greenbaum and Greenbaum (1983); Heath (1983) and McLaughlin (1989) highlight the impact cultural incongruities between school and home have on student performance and engagement.

When used as a critical tool, CRT has roots in the critical theory work of Paulo Freire. His views on education as a dialogic relationship, and the shift away from the

“banking model” of education (1970) can be seen in CRT’s goal of creating meaningful education for the student. It is through critical pedagogy that teachers and students are able to clearly see one another through their cultural, political, or socio-economic differences allowing for an education that fosters self-determination. Specifically, Freire and Macedo (1987); McLaughlin (1989); Moje (2000) and Wink (2000) address the ways in which a critical look at culturally relevant literacies impact underserved learners. In both Critical Theory and Culturally Relevant Teaching, the aim of education is to transform the individual into an adult capable of naming one’s world and of self-determination (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Delpit, 1988; Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 1995b, 1998; Sleeter, 2012). In part, teaching students to name their world requires educators to teach students about the role of power in the world they inhabit. CRT practices must integrate culturally relevant materials, but also must teach an understanding of how the culture of power operates. It is through this knowledge that students are able to create a Discourse that challenges hegemony, and stands in opposition to the backlash from the Discourse holding power (Delpit, 2006; Sleeter, 2012).

Castagno and Brayboy (2008) detail the history of CRT in Indigenous education by highlighting three major reports: *The Meriam Report*, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy – A National Challenge*, and *The Havighurst Report*, which called for the inclusion of Indigenous language and culture in the education of Indigenous students. The absence of change after these reports were published, and the increase in critical consciousness of the 1980s and 1990s, brought about Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) as a new theoretical framework for the Indigenous community (Brayboy, 2005).

In addition to a focus on self-determination and sovereignty, TribalCrit emphasizes the need to recognize the inherent colonization and racism in U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples, the assimilative aspects of education, and the value of traditional knowledge and epistemologies for Indigenous cultures (Brayboy, 2005). It is these elements of TribalCrit that support, and are supported by CRT. The colonization and assimilation of Indigenous peoples has radically changed tribal culture. This change was forced upon Indigenous peoples with no regard for their wishes, customs, or learning systems, and as a result has placed today's Indigenous students in a position where they are forced to adapt to Eurocentric ways if they are to be successful in schools (Brayboy, 2005; Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Patel, 2014; Smith, 2012).

Castagno and Brayboy (2008) identify the problem as a, "culture of whiteness that predominates in most U.S. schools; this whiteness is manifest in the predominately White education faculty, the social relations, the norms and expectations, and the inequitable access to resources and quality education within our school system" (p. 950). In short, our schools, regardless of the ethnic or cultural makeup of the student population, are often designed for the success of the white, middle class student. The monoculture of American schools creates the need for CRT; however, this monoculture often extends into the faculty, who are ill prepared to teach multicultural classrooms (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1998). For education to be culturally relevant, teachers, particularly those of a different culture, must be well versed in the culture of their students (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Nelson-Barber & Dull, 1998; Pewewardy & Hammer, 2003). Teachers must be prepared to learn from their students, and from the school's community in order to create the dialogic relationship (Freire, 1970) that is crucial for the success of

CRT. Expressing a view of “color blindness” does not ensure that students are being taught in culturally appropriate ways, and in fact ensures that the cultural values of the teacher will be taught. Thayer-Bacon (2008) explores the notion of cultural pluralism, and concludes that openness, flexibility, and acceptance of multiple ways to teach are fundamental to the success of all students. Delpit (2006) elaborates on need for educators to be intimately familiar with the communities they serve, as cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings that are interpreted as student deficiencies, rather than Discourse differences that need to be recognized and critically addressed.

The goals of CRT are to foster the academic development of underserved students, nurture and support the students’ cultural competence, and raise the students’ critical awareness (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). To effectively raise student performance in school, there must be a connection between the students and the knowledge being learned. The use of authentic, culturally relevant materials is an essential part of demonstrating respect for and value of the students’ culture, which allows students to bring their own cultural competence into the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Understanding and utilizing not just the knowledge students have, but the structure of that knowledge is a critical component for helping to create bridges between what they know and what they are learning (Gay, 2010). Creating this environment in which students feel successful and valued for what they already know encourages participation and fosters opportunities for higher level thinking discussions and activities in the classroom (V. Jones, 2012; Villegas & Lucas, 2007).

Brayboy (2005) specifically includes the requirement that CRT validate the students’ ways of knowing. For Indigenous students this means that education must

incorporate elements of traditional, Indigenous learning and teaching systems. This practice was explored in Alaska by the Ciulistet Teacher Leader Group, which looked at ways to incorporate Yup'ik knowledge into the classrooms. These teachers were able to document many successes in bridging Yup'ik knowledge with the Western classroom (Lipka & Ilutsik, 1995). CRT must validate the students' culture in a way that fosters engagement and value in both the self and education if children are to become self-determining adults (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Lipka, 2002).

CRT, while demanding new pedagogical approaches for middle class, white teachers in multicultural settings, involves more than teaching practices; it demands a mindset from the educator that entails reflective thought, an understanding and willingness to build social relationships with the community and students, and an intimate knowledge of the culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Thayer-Bacon, 2008). It is through this mindset that teachers can teach the whole student by incorporating a variety of pedagogical techniques to honor reality and relevance for the student (Gay, 2003, 2010).

Literature Review

As a humanities teacher of both English and social studies, I am inclined to look for ways to make the use of language and literacy in my classroom culturally relevant. Much of my curriculum is prescribed by state standards, which leaves little time for the incorporation of culturally relevant content in my classes. However, the pedagogical methods for assessing student learning allow for the opportunity to create an environment where culturally relevant practices occur. There are many aspects of literacy, language use, and educational practice that influence this study. Those that have the most impact are:

assessment, local literacies, student engagement, and place-based learning / funds of knowledge. Major tenets of each of these theories or practices support this study by providing the framework necessary for implementation into my classroom, or by helping me to meet both the state's requirements for standards-based instruction, and the community's desire to better utilize Indigenous learning methods in our school.

Assessment. A fundamental aspect of teaching is devising ways to assess student learning. In today's system of education, the results of normed, standards-based, assessments are directly tied to school funding. This has created a culture in schools where the "test" is the only measure of student knowledge and progress, which devalues the implementation of culturally relevant or bicultural teaching practices (Wyman et al., 2010). While the state mandated tests are unlikely to disappear, culturally relevant assessments do have a place in our schools and have the potential to more accurately portray student knowledge than the standards-based assessments commonly used (Demmert Jr, 2005; Hood, 1998; Nelson-Barber & Trumbull, 2007). Through the process of engaging the community and devising assessment strategies that support, validate, and represent cultural ways of knowing and doing, students have the potential to truly demonstrate what they have learned (Hood, 1998; Lee, 1998).

Culturally relevant teaching practices are a fundamental aspect of making education more equitable for all students. This equity must extend beyond teaching practices to include student assessments if students are expected to accurately demonstrate what they know. Nelson-Barber and Trumbull (2007) argue, "students' demonstrated competence depended on the match between the demands of a task, the context in which it is embedded, and the culturally developed skills of the learner" (p. 135). Using assessments

that are not aligned with cultural practices creates ambiguity in the students' results; teachers and evaluators cannot determine if the students struggling with the academic concepts, or if they are struggling with the underlying cultural bias of the test (Demmert Jr, 2005; Nelson-Barber & Trumbull, 2007).

Demmert Jr (2005) and Nelson-Barber and Trumbull (2007) make strong arguments for assessment as an inherently cultural process. If the mental mechanisms used to solve problems are socialized into us throughout our childhood, then the way in which students learn and are assessed in school must take this context into account. The ways students respond to questioning practices, take tests, and participate in discussions vary by culture. Students may show respect for authority by remaining silent, even when asked questions, which may be interpreted as students not having the knowledge the teacher believes they should have. Misunderstandings of this type will alter instructional practices, and may cause teachers to delay moving to new content when students have already mastered a concept.

Like all aspects of education, assessments carry with them an inherent cultural bias that asks Indigenous students to act in ways that are not culturally congruent. This can cause students to underperform, which negatively impacts their progress through school. Ensuring that students are assessed with tasks that allow them to demonstrate their mastery of the content, rather than a mastery of the dominant culture is necessary to foster parity in our schools.

Literacies. Literacy is typically explained as the ability to read and write the dominant language of a society, and often brings about thoughts of children learning to read in schools (Street & Lefstein, 2007, p. 35). However, literacy is also characterized by

practices that relate to local experiences and knowledge (Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Reder & Davila, 2005; Scribner & Cole, 1978). It is these local literacies that tie into CRT and can allow schools to validate this aspect of Indigenous culture by incorporating them into the classroom.

Studies focusing on literacies encompass many aspects of language use and society including social class, economic status, second language use, and ethnic or racial group. Heath (1983) and Scribner and Cole (1981a) examine the impacts of culture and location on language and literacy use. Both studies indicate cultural practices strongly impact language use, thereby supporting the notion that there are multiple, culturally distinct, literacies. In a review of the literature on the impacts of socio-cultural divisions on reading, Cazden (1981) surmises that cultural or peer group values may strongly impact a student's performance with literacy.

The interpretation of literacies is inherently a social and political act. Accepting or rejecting a literacy as a valid representation of a social group creates the potential for a hegemonic situation. The dominant group, or "Big D" Discourse, is able to assert its power over less powerful discourses by rejecting their literacies (Gee, 2012, 2015a). This rejection is a political action that can be viewed, in the case of rejecting Indigenous literacies, as a colonizing force (Street, 1995). In Yup'ik culture the natural world is the text for many of its literacies. Kawagley (2006) discusses the lack of Yup'ik scientific practices, or scientific literacy skills that are incorporated into classrooms. This rejection of Yup'ik processes and literacies creates a climate in which Indigenous knowledge is superseded by the knowledge and literacy practices of the dominant, school culture. The contextual nature of literacy, and the ability to politicize the interpretation of literacy creates a

situation in which differing Discourses, such as the school's and the community's, come into conflict creating obstacles to success for students.

Multiliteracies. The impact of socio-economic class, and cultural group on literacy use and development has continued to be researched with a focus on how this idea impacts educational pedagogy and practices. The recognition that multiple literacies have impacts and roles in society was coined *multiliteracies* by the New London Group (Cazden et al., 1996). At its core, multiliteracies recognizes the value of meaning-making in society, and offers opportunities for those people outside the traditional power center to make meaning of the world in ways that support and develop their interactions with society.

Cummins (2009) applies this empowerment to the classroom with transformative multiliteracies. He discusses the need for the recognition that multilingual students are utilizing literacies that differ from those expected to be used in school. He advocates for the integration of multimodal and multilingual literacies into the classroom as means to validate students' knowledge and literacies. Both he and Cope and Kalantzis (2009) describe pedagogical approaches that assume all students are intelligent and creative, and that teachers foster an environment in which students can make sense of the world using all literacies available to them, and not just the traditional literacy of reading and writing in the dominant dialect.

Cope and Kalantzis (2009) revisit the ideas presented they helped present in the 1996 New London Group paper. They address how the continuing development of technology and has increased the need for multimodal literacy. Technology's rise and continued integration into more aspects of our lives demands that we are able to interpret these digital texts in relation to their context. These authors highlight seven modes of

multimodal literacy, three of which: visual, audio, and gestural literacies are integral to interpreting *yuraq*. Unsworth (2001) also discusses the increase in multimedia texts and the necessity to interpret visual images in addition to text. He states that visual images display the world, while the written text narrates the context. This could be extended to *yuraq* with the visual image as the dancer, and the writing as the song.

In a call for research, Moje (2009) highlights the need for more studies on the impacts multiliteracies are having on student outcomes, and on how multiliteracies can be used to engage students more deeply in their learning. The incorporation of multiliteracies into the classroom, and the recognition of the value these multiple and varied literacies have on student development is of the utmost importance to ensure schools are fostering student growth, and not perpetuating an inequitable status quo.

Indigenous literacies. Incorporating Indigenous literacies into the classroom can offer many Native students a sense of empowerment by demonstrating that Native language and literacies carry equal standing with the dominant culture's language and literacies (McCarty, Romero, & Zepeda, 2006; McLaughlin, 1989). These literacies provide validation of the students' cultural knowledge and practices increasing the likelihood of their success in school. Indigenous literacies tend to focus less on independent seat work, and offer more opportunities for students to engage in learning in a style that more closely resembles their culture's learning methods (McKeough et al., 2008; Schneider, 2000; Young, 2010).

A critical aspect of literacies in Indigenous cultures is the integration of orality into the definition of literacy. Given the large role stories and songs play in disseminating Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous literacies and pedagogical systems exist on a continuum

of oral and written texts (Zepeda, 1995). She explains how the oral, storyteller tradition of the O'odham influences the writing in English of today's O'odham children. The patterns of thought and language structure from stories are integrated into the writing in school. The Eurocentric model of literacy devalues the blend of orality and writing of Indigenous literacies forgetting that all literacies were once passed down by using the natural world as the primary text (Balanoff, 2005). In both Indigenous and non-Indigenous literacies meaning is made, which makes each a viable way to communicate ideas (Balanoff, 2005; McKeough et al., 2008; Young, 2010).

The incorporation of Indigenous elements, such as story telling patterns and a deep sense of local connection, create a unique literacy for each culture (Dickinson, 1994; Lipka & Yanez, 1998; Scribner & Cole, 1981b; Zepeda, 1995). Through these traditional literacies, students are engaged in deep listening and processing in order to learn from the story. Integrating stories and songs into the classroom affords students the opportunity to make stronger connections between their school learning and the knowledge they bring with them to class. The contextual nature of Indigenous literacies can help students to make meaning of the experiences they have while in the school building (McKeough et al., 2008).

These literacies are representative of the culture; therefore, they are able to present Indigenous knowledge more effectively than Eurocentric literacy (Lipka, 1998b). A major tenet of CRT states that students need to be able to demonstrate their expertise in their own culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995b) making local literacies a valuable skill to address in schools.

Yup'ik literacies. The incorporation of local, Yup'ik literacies into the Western classroom has been tried in a number of rural Alaskan schools. Lipka, Wildfeuer, and

Wahlberg (2001) blend the Yup'ik literacy practice story knifing with mathematics. This study examines how to integrate an Indigenous learning method as a tool for meeting non-Indigenous, academic standards. Augustine (2008) uses Total Physical Response Storytelling as a way to incorporate traditional, Yup'ik storytelling into the classroom, and as a way to integrate the physical movements associated with Yup'ik storytelling and dancing into her lessons. Cleveland (2012) created a unit in which a traditional, Yup'ik literacy skill, story knifing, is incorporated into the classroom. Cleveland has students write stories using story knife techniques as pre-writing, and finds that her experimental group wrote longer, more detailed stories, and scored higher on the assignment than her control group who did not engage in story knifing.

Samson (2010) integrates *yuraq*, Yup'ik dance, into her class as a means to teach the 6-trait writing system. *Yuraq* is considered a form of literacy in this study with gestures, tone, and pitch as multimodal elements. She contends that *yuraq* can be inserted into other content as a medium for students to use to demonstrate their learning. John (2010) expounds upon Yup'ik ways of knowing and learning in her focus on *yuraq*. She contends that Yup'ik teaching methods of story and dance create deeper knowledge, because children are required to listen closely so as not to lose any of the knowledge they are being taught. Wahlberg (1996) explains historical teaching practices of the *qasgiq*, men's house. She focuses on storytelling and dance as literacy practices used to teach. Stories and dances of this kind were locally relevant and culturally contextual. This allowed children to make meaning of the stories and songs, and made it easier for them to remember the lessons.

These examples support the potential success of this proposal; however, all of these studies and projects were targeted at the elementary level leaving a gap in the research requiring similar studies aimed at students in the middle and high school grades. The integration of local literacies as pedagogical methods for teaching non-local content is not a new idea, but one that has not been fully explored. The value of fostering student pride in their local literacies, and demonstrating the applicability of these literacies in academia can empower students to engage more in their own educations.

Student engagement. Many teachers, myself included, feel student engagement is critical for academic success in schools (Crumpton & Gregory, 2011; Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; King & McInerney, 2014; Marzano, Pickering, & Heflebower, 2011; Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, & Shernoff, 2003). In order for pedagogical practices involving local literacies to impact students, the students must be engaged in the learning process. However, student engagement is often vaguely defined and difficult to index, which has led to a plethora of studies under the umbrella of engagement that focus on a variety of topics, such as motivation, attention, interest, effort, enthusiasm, participation and involvement (Caspary & Santelices, 2009; Marzano et al., 2011). For the purposes of this study, engagement will be broadly defined as, “students attending to the instructional activities occurring in the class” (Marzano, 2007, p. 99).

Defining engagement in terms of student participation and attention in the classroom is still too vague to be of use for most teachers. Marzano et al. (2011) identifies four elements that comprise student engagement: emotions, interest, perceived importance, and perceptions of efficacy (pp. 3-18). While each of these is important for students to be engaged in the classroom, interest and perceived importance hold a close

relationship with cultural relevancy. The utilization of culturally relevant teaching practices is more likely to generate what Marzano et al. call individual interest, which is the long-term interest in a topic. Dunleavy and Milton (2008) expound upon a similar idea with intellectual engagement. This is a deeper engagement in which students find intrinsic value and purpose in their schooling through real-world situations allowing them to solve problems, share knowledge, and feel valued and respected for what they bring to the class. Shernoff et al. (2003) take this idea further with Csikszentmihalyi's theory of *flow*, which, when applied to schools, demonstrates that students desire meaning and challenge in their academic work, without which, they become disinterested and disengaged. Cultural relevancy also fosters perceived importance with the personal connections students are able to make to the classroom, pedagogy, and content leading to higher levels of student success (Crumpton & Gregory, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Multiple studies have demonstrated that when students are more engaged they achieve better results in school (Crumpton & Gregory, 2011; Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; Marzano, 2007). The study of engagement's impact on achievement began as early as the 1970s; four early studies that demonstrated effect sizes over 0.75 and percentile gains between 27-31 were Bloom, 1976; Frederick, 1980; Lysakowski & Walberg, 1982; and Walberg, 1982 (as cited in Marzano, 2007). Though there is not a single, agreed upon definition of student engagement, the benefits of students engaging in their learning are largely unquestioned by teachers and researchers. These early studies demonstrate the importance of fostering an environment where students want to take part in learning.

There are many ways in which teachers can create an environment that supports student engagement. Using a variety of activities, games, or unusual content will likely

increase interest level in the material. However, increasing students' perceived importance of the content will develop long term engagement, and has the potential to benefit students after their schooling is completed (Marzano et al., 2011). CRT adds an element to perceived importance that builds the personal connection between the student and the school for underserved students (Crumpton & Gregory, 2011; Gay, 2003; A. Jones, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1995a) by demonstrating that the teacher values the student and his/her culture. The personal relationship between the teacher and the student is one of the strongest indicators for highly engaged students (Anderman, Andrzejewski, & Allen, 2011; Cooper, 2014; Klem & Connell, 2004; Savage et al., 2011). Building the relationship between the teacher and his/her students, and fostering a culturally relevant environment necessitate inclusive teaching practices that reach all students in the classroom.

This personal relationship is the first of the four motivational conditions outlined by Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) in the Motivational Framework for Culturally Relevant Teaching designed to increase intrinsic motivation in culturally diverse students. This framework begins with *establishing inclusion*, which consists of building the relationship with students to foster cooperation and collaboration. As indicated above, this relationship is a pivotal aspect of helping students to see value in their work. Developing a *positive attitude* is the second step; designed to create relevance, this aspect of CRT asks educators to offer choices that best fit individual learner's needs. *Enhancing meaning* creates rigor in the assignment and allows for students to pursue ideas they develop through an inquiry process. Lastly, *engendering a sense of competence* encourages self-assessment and connecting the task to the students' world beyond the classroom (Ginsberg, 2014;

Wlodkowski, 1999; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). This framework highlights many of CRT's core tenets and practices in a way that fosters increased intrinsic motivation.

Culturally relevant ideas, beliefs, and knowledge can be utilized to help students create relationships in which they feel valued, and to ensure they have a solid entry point into the discussions, problem solving and meaning making that occurs in the classroom (Ginsberg, 2014). It is through these relationships and feelings of value fostered by CRT that students are encouraged to engage in activities with a sense of personal investment in their education.

Funds of knowledge / place based learning. One of the core tenets of CRT requires teachers to utilize knowledge and practices that are derived from their students' culture. The integration of the funds of knowledge available to students from outside the classroom, and the incorporation of place-based learning activities offers an opportunity for teachers to engage students in culturally and locally relevant ways (Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1998; Moje et al., 2004; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). While both of these concepts are addressed in the theory of culturally relevant teaching, they are integral to the design of this study, thus require further review.

Moll et al. (1992) define funds of knowledge as, "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (p. 133). These non-academic pools of knowledge that students already have or have access to are prime sources for teachers to use as anchor points for academic instruction. Agricultural practices, repair work, childcare, and construction are a few examples of funds of knowledge that many students have access to, but are not highly valued in schools (Moll et al., 1992). The integration of these knowledge

bases into classrooms can help students feel more pride in their cultural knowledge, create a stronger cultural identity, integrate the culture of the community into that of the school, and benefit English language learning (ELL) students in both academic proficiency and language acquisition (Moje et al., 2004; Moll et al., 1992).

For teachers to effectively utilize funds of knowledge in the classroom, they must first become students of the knowledge being brought into class. Reaching out to students in their homes is an effective way to learn about the home life, cultural knowledge and values of the students (Araujo, 2009; Moje et al., 2004; Moll et al., 1992). Building a strong relationship with the families of Indigenous students can be a successful method for schools to strengthen the support the students receive at home. This creates a reciprocally beneficial relationship in which both sides are able to demonstrate their strengths, and to learn from each other. Moje et al. (2004) claim the value placed on cultural knowledge when used in the classroom builds a stronger cultural identity for the learners, while Araujo (2009) highlights how the addition of funds of knowledge to the classroom breaks down deficit views of student capabilities, and can build a more harmonious relationship between the school and the community it serves.

The incorporation of familiar knowledge and practices can help with language learning as well. Given the large number of ELL students in my classroom, additional strategies and methods for helping students make language proficiency gains is an added benefit of incorporating this concept into the study. When ELL students are engaged in higher level thinking tasks in content area classes, such as social studies, they often struggle with the academic language production. This creates a situation in which students are being asked to learn new, difficult social studies concepts while simultaneously

learning the language necessary to discuss the concepts. Utilizing funds of knowledge as topics for language learning can assist students in developing the academic language more quickly because they already know the content (Araujo, 2009; Dworin, 2006). Through this approach teachers are able to help students make gains in language acquisition while increasing the volume and quality of classroom interactions (Haneda & Wells, 2012).

The integration of funds of knowledge into the classroom can be understood as a form of place based education, and is aligned with some of the tenets of CRT. The purpose of place-based education is to integrate the local knowledge and local environment into the education of children. The utilization of local knowledge is critically important for Indigenous students and cultures seeking self-determination and sovereignty. Many examples of place-based teaching have been successfully modeled in Alaska Native village schools (Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1998) in which the community was able to integrate cultural knowledge to meet community needs. Place-based education also helps to build the community's confidence in the school, and fosters stronger community input in the direction of the school, as well as builds a healthier, more trustworthy relationship between the leadership of the school and the leadership of the community (Kushman & Barnhardt, 2001).

As previously discussed, CRT necessitates the shift toward self-determination. Place-based education is one avenue by which Indigenous peoples are able to regain control over the education of their children. In an article detailing the history of Alaska Native education, Kawagley highlights the need for place-based education to preserve the subsistence lifestyle. He argues that for Indigenous people to be able to practice their traditional, subsistence lifestyle, the children must be taught the skills necessary to survive

(1999). The survival he discusses refers to both the physical survival and the cultural survival of the people. Without the knowledge about the land and language, the Yup'ik culture will not survive. He makes similar comments in a speech where he calls on Alaska Natives to create their own reality to solve their problems using their cultural knowledge, creative minds, and rational thinking (Kawagley, 2010). Okakok (2010) discusses the need for Inupiat people to assert control over the education of their children. Her focus on maintaining cultural identity in education supports the desire for self-determination in the schools. The empowerment of Native people through controlling educational practices and content leads to another benefit of place-based education, which is greater community involvement in the school.

A large disconnect often exists between Indigenous schools in rural Alaska and the communities they serve. The power structure of the school system is typically setup in a way that does not afford much decision making to local control, which creates disharmony and distrust between the school and community (Ongtooguk, 2010). Increasing community involvement in the school will inevitably require school systems to share control and leadership, which can create better harmony and more fruitful relationships (Kushman & Barnhardt, 2001). These authors identify four components needed to generate a positive community voice: shared decision-making, integration of culture and language, Elder involvement, and partnership activities. Place-based learning activities and pedagogy will foster this community voice, and help integrate the school into the cultural life of the village offering another means by which to preserve the culture's values and knowledge.

The continuation of cultural knowledge and practices is another benefit to using place-based teaching practices, and another tenet of CRT. The goal of increasing students' knowledge about their own culture, and increasing the value students place on that cultural knowledge is incredibly important. Integrating place-based teaching activities helps to demonstrate the value of local knowledge (Kawagley, 1999). Many Indigenous youth do not see the value in maintaining their cultural knowledge. There are many other activities competing for their time, and often their heritage knowledge is left behind. The inculcation of Indigenous youth with television, Internet, and now the world of social media has created a disconnect between these children and their culture's past. Reintegrating cultural knowledge in the schools may offer a way to rebuild heritage knowledge in children (Davidson & Napoleon, 2010; Demmert, 2010).

The use of place-based learning practices is well documented in Alaska Native schools. Integrating community activities, such as subsistence practices into the science classes has been a successful way to teach cultural survival skills with Western scientific concepts (Kawagley, 2006; Kawagley, Norris-Tull, & Norris-Tull, 2010). Blending classes into learning activities that integrate language learning, science, math and history is another way in which cultural knowledge and place-based knowledge can be taught in the school. Activities, or thematic units that deal with cultural knowledge are a prime example of blended classes that create a more holistic learning process mirroring the structure of Native knowledge and worldview (Kawagley, 1999). The use of Yup'ik mathematics that focuses on patterns and the mathematical way in which humans interact with the environment was successful in integrating Indigenous knowledge into the school (Lipka, 1998a). The reintroduction of the *qargi*, traditional men's house in Inupiat culture, offers a

chance to strengthen new knowledge with the historical knowledge of Elders. In this model Elders teach in the *qargi*, and a cooperating teacher supports the Elder's instruction in the classroom. In this way students are gaining traditional knowledge, and learning how to integrate it into their modern lives (MacLean, 2010).

All of these examples, as well as many other examples, both documented and not, have been successfully implemented in schools in Alaska. Place based educational practices and funds of knowledge support many of the core tenets of CRT, as well as the pedagogical practices used in this study. Local literacies and student engagement are also key parts of this study, and integrate themselves into CRT by addressing the need to increase the relevance of material to students, and to work to fully engage students in the learning process. It is by creating intrinsically motivated students that education provides the most opportunities for self-determination.

Chapter 3: Study Design and Methods

Positionality

Having been raised in Western culture in the Lower 48, I was educated by teachers using Eurocentric literacy skills and pedagogical techniques. I know I learn best through these literacy techniques, and have inherent bias that learning through reading is the most effective way to master new content. Because I was aware that this project utilized a pedagogical structure that I know did not fit my preconceived notions of learning, I consciously attempted to deliver the lessons with the same level of academic rigor and enthusiasm as all lessons I teach.

Herr and Anderson (2014) discuss the issue of researcher positionality in terms of the relationships between the researcher, participants, and setting. I had taught at this school from 2009 to 2016, so I knew the 10th graders in this study since they were in 4th grade. The length of my relationship with them has created a tremendous amount of tacit knowledge, or pre-conceived notions, as to what they are like as students. To them, in the school setting, I am an insider in a position of power over other insiders, namely, themselves. However, as a non-Yup'ik person in a Yup'ik school I am an outsider. This places me as both an insider and an outsider as I begin the study. Balancing these dual roles as the authority figure in the classroom, yet a student in the content I was attempting to facilitate meant that I had to find ways to turn over control of the lesson and instruction to the students. I was able to step back and allow individual students take the role of “disseminator of information”, which was helpful for me to balance these roles.

As an outsider to Yup'ik culture, I needed to gain information about the topics that were going to be a part of this study. I had a number of positive discussions with

community members about *yuraq* and about Yup'ik learning; however, when the time came for individuals to come to the school to discuss *yuraq* with the students, I was unable to find anyone willing to present to the class. I have no confirmed answers as to why this occurred, but my outsider position, and the outsider position of the school itself, may have led individuals to decline using the school setting to teach insider information, such as *yuraq*.

To minimize my tacit knowledge bias of the students (Herr & Anderson, 2014) when observing their engagement, I used an observation protocol that allowed me to track student participation at various tasks. This protocol was constructed to ensure I was able to consistently code the same behaviors as engaged behaviors throughout the study. However, I must recognize that my knowledge of my students' previous behaviors, attitudes, and skills impacted my interpretation of their data. I taught all of these students directly when they were 9th graders, and had them two times per day during their 10th grade year. While the protocol and consistent coding helped to minimize the impact of my prior knowledge, there was no way to fully remove it. Given the nature of this study, participant-action research, my role as the teacher in the classroom and how the tasks I designed impacted engagement were aspects of the study's focus. To ignore, or attempt to completely remove my knowledge of my students would devalue the study as a reflective tool for my professional development.

I also recognized that my role as an authority figure in the classroom impacted my students' responses, regardless of assurances that their participation in the study had no bearing on their performance in the class. The information they provided in their journal may have been skewed because they attempted to tell me what they thought I wanted to

hear. I assured them and their parents that this study was completely ungraded, and that their responses would not impact their grade or my opinion of them as a student in order to help minimize this effect. I also explained to them the value of their honesty in their journals, which should have helped to minimize their desire to please me as their teacher. Regardless of the assurances I made, the power dynamic typically present in the classroom will have had some impact on student responses.

Methods

The integration of culturally relevant teaching practices to determine their affect on student engagement and the value students place on education was the driving force behind this study. As an educator in the classroom, a teacher-action research study seemed to be able to provide both opportunities for my students and for me as a reflective practitioner. The central action in the study was the integration of elements of *yuraq* into a unit as means of assessing student learning of a concept wholly unrelated to Yup'ik culture. This unit was designed to utilize local, culturally relevant literacies as a way for students to demonstrate their understanding of women's rights in colonial era Africa as demonstrated in the novel *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe.

Site. The Lower Kuskokwim School District is located in Southwestern Alaska. The district is the geographic size of West Virginia, yet serves less than 4,000 students. The district is comprised of 22 isolated villages and Bethel, the regional hub. There is no road system in the region, aside from local systems within the villages. Travel to and from the villages and schools is limited to plane, boat, snow machine, and ice road depending on the time of year. This study occurred in one of the larger villages in the district where I taught English and social studies at the high school level for seven years. At the request of

parents, who wish to maintain their students' anonymity, the village will not be named. The village, along with the rest of the district is primarily comprised of Yup'ik people, an Alaska Native ethnic group.

Participants. This study occurred in a Literature Lab class, which was designed as a supplemental language arts course to support student language development in English. The students participating in this class and study were all 10th graders taking this course along with Language Arts II. Many of the students are bilingual, and all identified as culturally Yup'ik. There were ten students participating in the study, seven boys and three girls. I selected this class for the study because of the curricular freedom allowed by the district. There is not a set scope and sequence for this class, because the purpose is to build student's language skills regardless of where they are when they enter at the beginning of the year. I offered the opportunity to participate to all students in this class, and all ten assented. During this class period I also had four other students in the room taking government or world history. These students were not an active part in the literature lab class, and were primarily completing digital-based courses during this class period. No data was collected on them, nor were they asked to participate in any aspect of the study, but their presence did affect the dynamic in the classroom, as I was responsible for teaching them during this time as well. I would frequently need to check on their progress and answer their questions while my Literature Lab class was working.

I also worked with two members of the community, one current teacher and one former pre-school teacher. I had discussions with them prior to initiating the study to assess the value they saw in integrating *yuraq* into the classroom. We also discussed engagement, culture, and teaching practices in these conversations to help me understand

the context of *yuraq* within Yup'ik learning. Their ideas and advice were invaluable as this study progressed, and the context they provided was used frequently in the analysis of the data. Upon completion of the defense draft of this paper they were consulted for a member check to offer feedback on the study, and to approve of their comments. Both individuals were pleased with both the study and how their contributions were portrayed.

Approvals. The initial step to begin this study required gaining UAF IRB approval, which was done in November 2016. Once the university approved the ethical nature of the study, I presented my thesis proposal to the principal and the assistant superintendent to ascertain the procedures for conducting research in our school. The process required approval from the local, advisory school board (ASB) and the district school board, as well as parental consent and student assent. I prepared a letter to the district board and met with them via teleconference to outline my proposal. Their primary concerns were that the district video taping policy be followed and that student anonymity be protected. After deliberation, they conditionally approved the project pending approval by the ASB. I met with the ASB at their next meeting to propose my study. Given the relationships I had developed with the board in the past, approval was granted with very few concerns. One member was excited about the integration of *yuraq* in the school, while another commented on the research Dr. Leisy Wyman conducted in the past. It is possible that having Dr. Wyman conduct thorough research that built strong relationships with the village left a favorable impression of academic research in the community. Finally, I met with the parents of the students being asked to participate. I explained the study in detail, and asked for their consent to allow their children to be involved with the study. All parents consented, and most asked that I make sure to retain the anonymity of their

children. I also spoke with the students about the study and asked for their assent, which was received for all ten students in this class.

Research design. This inquiry utilized a teacher-action research design to investigate the relationship between culturally relevant literacies and student engagement. As Johnson (2012) states, “In an action research project, you are not trying to prove anything...The goal is simply to understand” (p. 19). With this in mind, I looked at the way my students were engaged in lessons from the perspective of the teacher as a necessary participant in the classroom (Herr & Anderson, 2014); in addition, I asked students to reflect on their own level of engagement in the lessons. Using action research allowed me to understand how utilizing Yup’ik pedagogical techniques and literacies impacted my students’ engagement in a way that informed my teaching practice.

Procedures. At the outset of this study, I met with the aforementioned individuals who are current or former employees of the school to discuss how this project may work in the classroom. I received guidance and feedback on which literacies would be most effective to integrate into the classroom, and was advised that story knife would probably not be acceptable to use with high school aged boys. One woman believed that story knife, while a female activity, could be observed by the boys in the class without offending them, “traditionally, men weren’t allowed, but I never heard of a boy getting kicked out from listening before.” However, another woman I spoke with, a current teacher and the mother of one of the participants in the study, advised that, “it’s just for girls. It might make some people upset if boys have to do it too.” It seemed that having a task that asked boys to do an activity that was not masculine might offend the students and their parents, which led me to reduce the focus of the study to storytelling and *yuraq*. I was especially cautious

about this aspect of the study, particularly given the authority role I play in the classroom. At no point did I want the students to feel as though they had to participate in an activity that made them feel uncomfortable, and I could easily see how students may feel they had no choice once the study began.

As I began designing the lessons I realized that including multiple forms of Yup'ik literacies was creating a broader scope than necessary, and might force the analysis to become too broad. I chose to narrow the focus further to *yuraq* as a means of assessing student learning. After talking with the elementary Yugtun language teacher, I felt that *yuraq* was a better choice for students to be able to use to demonstrate their own knowledge. She used dance in her class to teach cultural elements, and believed that it helped to engage students and to help them focus. The former pre-school teacher I spoke with also believed *yuraq* was a good option for students. When I began explaining the idea for the study, she immediately mentioned Byron Nicholai, a Yup'ik teenager from a different village, who has done a lot of work to share *yuraq* and Yup'ik culture around Alaska and the Lower 48. Nicholai played traditional *yuraq* songs, as well as composed modern songs using the *yuraq* style. This lent validity to the notion that *yuraq* could be used as a modern means of learning and sharing knowledge.

In order to fully implement this study, I needed to utilize my relationships with community members to better inform myself on Yup'ik literacy practices and pedagogical techniques. It was vital that I was informed on the unique nature of Yup'ik literacy and pedagogy in order to assist my students in this culturally relevant activity (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). The relational aspect between my students and myself, and between the community and myself influenced my ability to gain the knowledge necessary to implement

this study. Fostering these relationships with respect and reciprocity was essential to gain and maintain the trust of the village with respect to their knowledge, and with respect to the education of their children (Brayboy et al., 2012; Wilson, 2008).

One of my former students, originally from another village where *yuraq* is performed more frequently, agreed to come in to discuss how to perform *yuraq* and how to write songs. Unfortunately, when it came time for him to come to the school to present, he was not available. I asked him who else might be willing to come in to help, but he was not sure. I checked with some Native teachers to see if they could think of anyone who might come in to help with this, but I was unable to find anyone. This led me to talk with the students who were going to participate in the study to find out if they knew of anyone who might come in. As it turned out, I had a number of students, five, who danced regularly and felt confident enough to teach their classmates. We discussed how this might be accomplished, and one young man suggested we use YouTube videos to model the dances so he could explain the elements and characteristics of *yuraq* to his peers.

My original intention was to provide a forum for people to share traditional knowledge with our students by using traditional literacy methods, which would become models for our students. In actuality, students were able to bring to the classroom their own prior knowledge, which was highlighted and used as the primary mechanism for instruction, thereby validating the culture students brought with them to the classroom.

To begin the study I had students complete an academic writing assignment explaining women's rights as seen in *Things Fall Apart*. The impact the novelty of the *yuraq* assignment could have on engagement was a concern, which was a primary reason for beginning the study with this essay assignment. Introducing the data collection journals

and videotaping during an assignment on the same topic allowed students a chance to become comfortable with the process of being in a research study before they were going to be working with a new (to school) way of demonstrating their learning.

We then proceeded into the Yup'ik literacy aspect of the study in which students created *yuraq* songs explaining women's rights in Umuofia. I utilized YouTube and my expert students to discuss and break down the elements of a *yuraq* song. Students were grouped based on their reported previous dance experience, and began working to construct a *yuraq*-style song that demonstrated mastery of the content. Very early in this process one group made the decision to write their song in Yugtun (Group Y), while the other chose to write their song in English (Group E). Students prepared their songs for three class periods, and presented on the fourth. Unfortunately, a personal emergency caused me to miss the presentations, and delay the debriefing discussion for twenty-two days. While I was disappointed to have missed their presentations, I do not believe that this limits the validity of the data given the purpose of the study focuses on engagement in the process of learning, and not on the quality of the end result.

Data collection. I planned to initiate this study during the first semester of the 2015-2016 school year, and begin data collection during my unit on the first academic essay; however, the approval process was significantly more time intensive than I predicted, and the actual execution of the study occurred in February of 2016 during our unit on the novel *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe. Data were collected using four methods: field notes and professional reflections on my students' engagement in class, student journals, video recordings, and conversations with the class and community members.

As an active participant in this study, taking detailed field notes during my lessons was challenging, bordering on impossible. Johnson (2012) offers a solution to this problem with the recommendation that teacher-researchers jot down brief notes that stimulate reflective thought after the lesson has been taught. Given the nature of reflection present in the teaching profession, I used this method to generate my field notes. Not only did this allow me to generate data for this inquiry, it was beneficial for my teaching practice, and something I did to a lesser degree already.

To generate student produced data concerning their engagement with the lessons I asked each student to keep a journal, which they used to respond to the following questions:

1. Did today's lesson allow you to fully engage in learning?
- 2a. Did you feel like you had a clear goal to accomplish today?
- 2b. If you answered yes to 2a, how did having a clear goal help you to become more engaged in learning?
3. Did today's lesson allow you to enjoy learning?
4. What, if any long-term value do you see in today's lesson for helping you in the future?
5. Did you feel successful with demonstrating what you've learned?
6. Rate your level of engagement in today's lesson.

Highly Engaged

Engaged

Somewhat Engaged

Slightly Engaged

Not Engaged

Journal responses began at the beginning of the essay lessons and continued until the end of the unit. Again, this collection method served both an inquiry purpose and a practical purpose. Students were encouraged to write in my classroom on a regular basis, and this task allowed me to introduce them to the idea of reflecting on how and why we learn.

To create an opportunity to probe students for deeper responses, I held a debriefing conference at the end of the unit. Johnson (2012) differentiates a conference from an interview by the level of preplanned structure to the questions. During this conference I asked students to provide their verbal feedback on the same topics they were writing about in their journals, and to discuss their thoughts on *flow* and what engagement means to them. My intention was to allow students to discuss their ideas in a safe, comfortable setting with their peers so they could build their own understanding of what makes education engaging, and to provide me an opportunity to question some aspects of their comments that I did not initially understand.

The final method of data collection was a protocol that was used to identify student engagement through the video recordings of the lessons. I watched the lessons with the protocol to identify examples of engaged behavior, which was looked at in relation to the students' own comments about the level of engagement they felt they had during the lesson. Not only did this method provide additional data to support my findings, it helped to shed light on how students view engaged behavior.

Data analysis. Given the qualitative nature of this study, I transcribed, reviewed, and coded the data to identify themes and patterns concerning student engagement (Creswell, 2012; Grbich, 2013; Mertler, 2011). Student journals, discussions with both students and community members, and field notes comprised the majority of data, which

was coded using an inductive system generated by evidence in the data, rather than a deductive system. I used descriptive, process, and “in vivo” codes to label actions, events, and quotes from my students. I then looked at the codes themselves for patterns that shed light on the research questions.

The data generated from the video protocol was analyzed to corroborate student perceptions of engagement. I reviewed what students wrote in their journals, and my own field notes, and then compared the level of engagement professed by the student to what I observed in the video. This helped me to triangulate what engaged behavior in this study actually looked like in students. The video data were also used to corroborate my field notes as a tool to refresh my memory of the lesson, which added to the validity of my findings.

Specifically, I looked for the impact Yup’ik culture had on what engagement in a task looks like. Using the discussions I had with both adults and students as a foundation for a definition of Yup’ik engagement coupled with actions that exemplified this definition became the initial task in analysis. This definition was used as the foundation for all additional analyses.

The impact the integration of local literacies had on my students’ engagement was analyzed by comparing their actions during their work writing an essay to their work creating the *yuraq* dance. While this analysis was not be able to make a clear claim regarding the engagement value of either task, it allowed me to descriptively compare and contrast their actions in both tasks, and to make a claim as to how the integration of a local literacy altered their actions.

Another important factor to consider was instances in which students professed, or demonstrated what Marzano et al. (2011) calls perceived importance, or what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls *flow*. The debriefing session coupled with a comparison of their journals to their actions shed light on whether students reached *flow*, and on what that state looks like and felt like from the students' perspective.

Lastly, the data was reviewed to explore what, if any impact the integration of the *yuraq* project had on the Discourse divide between the school and their homes. Discourse analysis in this study uses the definition of Discourse described by Gee (2015a). In this sense, Discourse, or "Big D" discourse, is the identity we take in a given social situation that includes the language and behaviors necessary to be accepted by others in the Discourse. The data was analyzed looking at ways in which elements of their home Discourse entered the classroom during these lessons. The study used descriptive Discourse analysis (Gee, 2014, pp. 8-9) to identify elements of both the school Discourse and the Discourse of the students' homes, and to determine whether the integration of *yuraq* as a local literacy encouraged students to utilize their home Discourse in the school.

Throughout the data analysis process, I attempted to restrain the impact my tacit knowledge of my students had on my interpretation of the data. However, given the value of local validity in this study, and that its purpose is to affect change in my classroom, some level of background knowledge about the students, their habits, and abilities was essential to ensure I accurately described the results in a way that was meaningful for all participants in the study. I intended to be explicit in the findings about how my tacit knowledge impacts the interpretation.

Chapter 4: Findings

The initial focus for this study was to determine if utilizing a local literacy practice in lieu of a Western literacy practice created more engagement in the activity. As I began to look through the data being collected, I realized it was not feasible to determine if the different literacy tasks were the driving factor behind student engagement in the lesson. This shifted the focus to an attempt to use student behaviors and conversations with both my students and community members to define engagement from a Yup'ik perspective, identify and describe the way in which the integration of this local literacy affected student engagement, and determine if this type of culturally relevant teaching impacted the Discourse divide between the students' homes and the school.

Cultural Sustainability

Prior to actually beginning the study in my classroom I discussed the ideas I had with some Yup'ik teachers and community members to ascertain their thoughts on my ideas. One of the themes that came up during these discussions was the way in which this type of learning can aid in cultural sustainability. Paris (2012) addresses the need for cultural pluralism in order to ensure Indigenous, and other underserved students have an education that not only recognizes their culture, but also works actively to sustain it. This notion of using schools as a means towards sustaining a culture resonated during my conversations with these community members.

A former pre-school teacher was very enthusiastic about the integration of Yup'ik cultural learning methods into my classroom, "this can create pride in the culture, but they're not always told. For years they were taught against pride." She was referring to having students do *yuraq* dances when she made this remark. For many years the local

church discouraged *yuraq*; in fact, it is still not an activity that is done at the community level for the public. She felt that *yuraq* had the potential to help students feel proud to be Yup'ik, and to take pride in their cultural heritage. The potential for this type of learning task to instill pride in students, and to demonstrate value for their cultural knowledge is one of the strongest indicators that culturally relevant teaching practices do benefit Indigenous students.

In speaking with this woman further, we discussed how the Yup'ik culture is shifting with Western influences leading to less children speaking Yup'ik and knowing Yup'ik ways of thinking and learning. The influences of the Lower 48 and *Kass'aq* (White) culture have caused significant changes in Yup'ik culture such as those discussed by Kawagley (2006). One of these influences is undoubtedly the Western style school that children are legally required to attend that uses Eurocentric pedagogies, rather than Yup'ik teaching methods (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 1998; Kawagley, 2006). She did not seem overly concerned by this transition with more Western influences, and said, "it's the values and beliefs that are the culture, not the teaching method." She did express the idea that doing *yuraq* songs in English, like was done in this study, may help them learn the cultural ideas, but could lead to the students not knowing their language as well. She also mentioned that since the more and more students and families were using English regularly, she didn't think it would be offensive or problematic to allow students to use English in *yuraq* songs. The way in which this study impacted language use was not a focus during its design, and the data did not address this issue either.

Yup'ik Engagement

Engagement, as discussed in the literature review, can be defined by a number of factors, which makes working to identify this aspect of learning a challenging endeavor (Caspary & Santelices, 2009; Marzano et al., 2011). Given the nature of this study, one that worked with cultural practices that are not part of the Eurocentric school model, it seemed prudent to work towards a definition of engagement from a Yup'ik perspective before further analyses of the impact this study had on student engagement. Utilizing discussions with Yup'ik educators and community members and a discussion held with the class as source material, Yup'ik engagement appeared to require at least three mechanisms: collaboration, a level of activity, and intense focus when listening. Through these three elements children were engaged in learning in a process that reflects cultural values.

Collaboration. Throughout the debriefing discussion with the students, one theme emerged very clearly in their replies to the questions, “what is engagement” and “what does it look like”. Five out of eleven responses to these questions related in some way to working collaboratively. Students defined engagement as “talking together,” “communicating with work,” and “giving out ideas and thoughts.” These comments indicated that the students felt that a large part of engagement in learning is comprised of working together.

When looking at possible explanations for why these students feel that engagement requires collaboration it seemed important to look to their previous educational settings and the funds of knowledge they brought to the classroom. Learning new tasks first begins long before students enter school. From their first day, children are constantly learning how to do new tasks, so logically, the way in which we learn begins to develop during the

pre-school years. If teachers can tap into these funds of knowledge to create bridges between home and school, students are more likely to be engaged in and place more value on their learning (Moje et al., 2004; Moll et al., 1992). For Yup'ik students this means many of the tasks they are learning how to do are collaborative in nature. Hunting is rarely done alone; it is common for a woman's family members to come help her clean catches, which are then shared; helping others complete tasks needed to maintain survival gear, like mending a boat or snow machine, is common. During my first year teaching, I took my students on a walk around the village to work on descriptive writing. Midway through our walk, a group of three men were trying to push a very large boat away from the slough for winter storage. One of them called over and asked if we'd help. I asked one of the boys if they wanted to help, and he quickly said yes, and indicated that helping others is a necessary part of his culture. These experiences, while anecdotal, can still shed light on some aspects of these students' backgrounds. This also exemplifies the idea that integrating place based learning, or community activities into the classroom can reinforce cultural values in the school (Moje et al., 2004). These anecdotes were not meant to be a definitive explanation for the responses of the students in this study, but to serve as some background to create context for the lives the students in this study live outside the classroom, and support the notion that place based, culturally relevant teaching practices can benefit students in the classroom.

An additional observation of the data revealed that collaborative work requires oral communication, rather than written, as no students commented on reading or writing as elements of being engaged. Even though all of these students are capable readers and writers, their responses to defining engagement in school focused on verbally sharing ideas

with one another. Attempting to pinpoint exactly why students believed engagement involves verbal tasks rather than written ones was not the purpose of this study, and the data did not support making any definitive claim in this regard. However, the fact that the students were quite capable with the Eurocentric forms of literacy: reading and writing, yet preferred to engage in oral language skills highlights the impact their cultural values have on their school performance and reemphasizes the importance of cultural relevancy in the classroom (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998). A possible, again anecdotal, theory I hold relates this belief back to the students' pre-school learning. Many of the tasks that Yup'ik people teach their children prior to attending school do not require written language to perform. While visiting a friend's home, I saw her cleaning fish in her living room with her granddaughter sitting next to her. The young girl watched, and at times the woman would give her instructions about what she was doing. This method of teaching children, model, explain, and practice is common for many subsistence tasks in Yup'ik culture.

Examples of collaboration in the classroom. At the risk of using a cliché, actions speak louder than words, so with that in mind it is important to define engagement using not just student words but their actions in the classroom as well. The first lesson on *yuraq* was designed as one that required student participation to be successful. Students were asked to watch some videos of *yuraq*, both traditional and modern (see Appendix A for links to videos), and then take the information they saw in the videos with their own knowledge to generate the parameters for our project. The parameters for the structural requirements of the songs were organically generated using their knowledge during this lesson. With my outsider status concerning Yup'ik knowledge, and *yuraq* in particular, it was important to accurately generate these parameters using their expertise.

During the video segment of the lesson, I asked students to begin compiling their thoughts about what makes a *yuraq* song. After we watched a number of videos of *yuraq* and of Byron Nicholai performing at various events, students were asked to share their ideas on what makes *yuraq, yuraq*. I took notes on the board so we could use them to synthesize the requirements for the song. One student, who does *yuraq*, took the lead and shared how the song goes back and forth between a chorus that has a moral and a verse that tells the story. Other students discussed this structure, and eventually they came to a consensus that this structure was a good description of a *yuraq* song. Throughout this discussion students were sharing their ideas, correcting one another, and building on one another's ideas. One young man came to the front to illustrate his ideas on the board, which led to further discussions among the class. According to the data, all students contributed to some degree to the discussion leading to a situation where all students could feel as though they have a personal stake in the success of the project. Creating this sense of ownership in the task is an aspect of CRT if the task is one that validates cultural knowledge (Brayboy, 2005). In this case, it appears that students were able to engage productively in this cultural task.

From a Western teacher's standpoint, this was a successful discussion in which students were participating and engaging in the learning process. They were constructing knowledge using their own thoughts, and I was able to step back to facilitate the discussion, and to ask questions when I was unsure about what they meant. Both the field notes and video protocol indicate the whole group was participating in this discussion. According to student journal responses, all nine students in class this day reported being engaged in the lesson when asked "Did today's lesson allow you to fully engage in learning?" They were

also asked to rate their level of engagement from Highly Engaged to Not Engaged (see journal questions on page 38). These responses were numerically coded with a 5 being Highly Engaged and a 1 being Not Engaged. The mean for this class period was a 4.111, which was the highest average of any class period. From a Yup'ik perspective, students were working together to accomplish a common goal, which meets one of the requirements of Yup'ik engagement as defined above.

A level of activity. During conversations with the former pre-school teacher and the current elementary Yugtun teacher the idea of physical activity during learning was another theme that became evident. Both stated that dance was an important part of culture, and that it can be used to teach. The Yugtun teacher stated, "For the younger kids, we do a lot of singing and dancing in class. It helps them focus." I asked if she often used dance to teach concepts as well, and she indicated that song was at times used to teach content, and not just as a means to allow students to release physical energy. The former pre-school teacher was equally enthusiastic about the use of *yuraq* in the classroom saying, "Hands on learning can make a full circle of learning, and not leave it behind." This seems to indicate that in doing something while learning can help students to retain that knowledge beyond the classroom. She also discussed how dance could keep knowledge alive by inspiring and teaching young people. These two ideas seemed to state that by using *yuraq* as a means of teaching content or assessing learning it may help students retain this knowledge.

Demmert (2010) and Davidson and Napoleon (2010) highlight the importance of using the school as a platform to reconnect students with their cultural heritage. While the school by itself cannot ensure cultural connections for students and the community, it can,

as was attempted in this study, create situations that afford the students an opportunity to participate in heritage activities that promote the value of both their cultural heritage and the curricular content which is a primary focus of culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

Another aspect of activity as an integral part of engagement that was evident in these conversations was the idea of translating or creating knowledge. Again, focusing on the conversation I had with the former pre-school teacher, “if they collect information and translate it into their own way, it shows the knowledge is gained.” She also felt that when students read in class, they often participate, but do not carry the knowledge with them when they leave. The ability to synthesize information is commonly used in Eurocentric schools as a measurement of how well students understand the concepts that were presented. This appears to be the same with Yup’ik culture. If students are able to translate, or manipulate the information into their own actions they have learned the concept. And, in one woman’s experiences, reading in class does little to help the students take ownership of a concept.

Examples of activity in the classroom. Reflecting back on the data to identify elements of activity that indicate student engagement in the lessons yielded one very evident theme; incidents where students were dancing, moving, or mimicking movements they saw on the videos corresponded with reports of engagement in the student journals. What was seen in field note and video analysis was supported by the students’ own statements. During the initial lesson on *yuraq*, fifteen instances occurred where students began to dance, drum, sing, or mimic the movements they were seeing on the video. These

events represented seven of the nine students in attendance. Actions ranged from dancing with arm motions to drumming on desks to singing and bouncing in their seats.

Looking again at the quantitative level of engagement from the student journal question explained earlier showed those students who were dancing reported higher levels of engagement than students who were not physically active. This is not indicative of a causal relationship between movement and engagement. There are a myriad of factors that can influence whether a student engages in physical movement in the classroom. The students who did not dance may not have known the movements, or they felt uncomfortable dancing because this was such a different type of lesson than they were used to. The reasons for not dancing or moving were not discussed with students, so a precise answer cannot be given. However, this data do show a positive correlation between movement and engagement, and from an educator's standpoint if students were moving, participating in the discussion, and reporting engagement in the lesson, this was a positive learning event in the classroom. Based on the reported data from student journals, it appeared that students had high levels of what Marzano et al. (2011) called perceived importance and individual interest. Students were demonstrating behaviors that indicated a sense of importance and enjoyment in the task they were completing, which, according to Marzano et al.'s theory, should have fostered a deeper level of engagement and value in the task.

The last day students worked on their *yuraq* songs also had a high engagement score from the last journal question: a 4.1. The video protocol and field notes indicated frequent physical activity throughout the class period. Students were repeatedly out of their seats creating the dance moves to the lyrics they wrote the class period before. Both

groups were constructive during this class period accomplishing much of the task, so the final day of work would be rehearsal. Group “E”, because their song was in English, asked for the use of a drum so they could practice in the same manner that they would perform. Group “Y” was less active, but also needed part of the class period to finish translating their lyrics into Yugtun. Comparing their stated level of engagement using the average of the journal question to the previous class period where the groups spent the whole time writing lyrics shows a jump from 3.66 to a 4.1. Again, there are too many variables to be conclusive in making the claim that the scores went from 4.11 during the initial lesson on *yuraq* to 3.66 while writing lyrics, to 4.10 when creating the dance directly because of the activity; but again, students claimed a higher level of engagement, and there was a diminished frequency of off task behaviors during this lesson, which made this a productive class period.

As discussed previously in Marzano et al. (2011) and Caspary and Santelices (2009) work, engagement is often difficult to define and measure given the various subtopics that fall under this topic. As an educator conducting an action research study, I was most concerned with my students being engaged in the lesson in ways that can be qualitatively defined and replicated in future lessons with them, and less so with proving the level of engagement quantitatively. Finding an operational definition of engagement for the group of students in the classroom helped to ensure local validity (Herr & Anderson, 2014) in the study, and gave me a ideas on how to better engage this class in the future.

Intense focus while listening to instruction. The third element of engagement from a Yup’ik perspective found in the data related to the level of focus students had when listening to instruction. I spent some time watching NYO (Native Youth Olympics) practice

while talking with the 7th grade teacher in the school. He is an older, Yup'ik man, and has coached and taught for over twenty years. We discussed the idea for the project, which he supported, and then I observed how he interacted with the team during practice. While this setting is not an academic one, he takes great care in teaching these young athletes how to be successful in their events. He has earned acclaim as a coach, being named Team Alaska's coach in the Arctic Winter Games on a number of occasions, and repeatedly sending athletes to represent LKSD at the state meet. The methods he uses to instruct this cultural activity should be exemplary in demonstrating how to engage Yup'ik students.

The dominant theme in the data when looking at how he taught was the level of focus visible in the students when listening to his directions. The athletes were always looking at him while he was speaking, and often repeated back what he said to ensure they understood his expectations. At the end of practice he called the team over to where he was sitting in the bleachers, and they all sat in front of him in silence. He did not have to ask for their attention once. They were sitting up, leaning in, and visibly tracking or watching him while he was recapping practice and explaining what the upcoming weekend was going to look like at their competition. The students were listening with enough focus for it to be visibly obvious that they were engaged. This visually evident listening further exemplifies the notion that Yup'ik engagement involves physical activity.

Each year the school hosts culture week, which is a time when academics are put aside, and Elders and community members come to the school to teach students how to create cultural art or complete a traditional Yup'ik activity. Many years I was asked to be a part of the group working on soapstone and ivory carving. One of the Elders would come to the school, and for most of the morning of the first day he would tell stories and talk to

the students about carving. Each year, students would sit on the floor, leaning in, sitting up, and visibly focused on what they were being told. Historically, Yup'ik children would be taught all of the necessary tasks and stories of their culture through listening to the Elders. Since there was no written record for them to refer back to after they were told this information, it was critically important for them to actively listen with intense focus so as not to lose the knowledge.

Examples of intense focus while listening in the classroom. As discussed in the procedures section of this paper, there was no expert presenter available to come in, so we relied on videos of *yuraq* and the students' own knowledge to create the requirements for this assignment. The students appeared to treat the videos as the expert speaker, and their actions during the videos, aside from mimicking the movements they saw, resembled those actions of the NYO players and the students listening to Elders during culture week. When the videos started the class leaned in to watch, visibly tracked the movements on the screen, and physically responded to instances of humor, as well as miming the dance gestures. These physical responses indicated engagement in the task, and mirrored those indicators of engagement in other Yup'ik activities.

In our class debriefing discussion, student responses to the question "what is engagement?" yielded listening as a theme. As discussed earlier, most responses to this question focused on collaboration as engagement, but three of the eleven responses focused on listening as a core aspect of engagement. Students felt that "listening", as well as "looking at the teacher" and "sitting up, watching, and listening to the teacher" were requirements for students to be engaged in the lesson. The student's comment concerning

sitting up, watching, and listening to the teacher closely resembles the apparent expectation for listening behavior when students are being taught by their Elders.

Using these conversations with community members and teachers as well as the conversations and actions of the students generated three major types of behavior that indicated engagement from a Yup'ik perspective: collaboration, physical activity, and focused listening. The observation of these in the lessons during this study seemed to indicate that these students were engaged in the learning process during this series of lessons in which they utilized a local literacy, *yuraq*, as a means of demonstrating their knowledge.

Impact of Local Literacy on Engagement

Measuring student engagement in a task with enough certainty to make a claim that one task was more engaging than another was beyond the scope of this study and the capabilities of this researcher. In lieu of making a definitive claim about the precise value of either pedagogical method, Yup'ik or Eurocentric, this study focused on describing the differences in engagement seen in students during each type of lesson. It is through this comparison that evidence of how the integration of local literacies, such as *yuraq*, impact student engagement.

Engagement in a Eurocentric literacy activity. At the onset of the study, students were asked to write an essay that detailed the ways in which women were mistreated in Umuofia, and to explain to the Elders of the community how they could alter the villagers' behaviors to be more in line with the United Nations' *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women*. This essay was a part of the unit taught on *Things Fall Apart*, a novel by Chinua Achebe, and one that I had taught on a number of occasions in

the past. Engagement in this activity appeared, from a Western teacher's perspective, to be high. Students were given four class periods to develop a thesis, pre-write, draft, revise, edit, and complete this essay. Throughout the four class periods, most students were working towards this goal with little off-task behavior. It was through these lessons that the student journals, filming, and field notes were introduced. In order to minimize the amount of new events happening in the classroom, it seemed important to introduce the class to some elements of the study prior to the integration of the *yuraq* project. This also provided data on their levels of engagement throughout the essay, which allowed for this comparison.

Student engagement during this lesson consisted primarily of writing tasks. Students were observed writing frequently, either creating graphic organizers to structure their essays or writing drafts of the thoughts. Using their copy of the story, many students reread passages that showed how women were mistreated in the village. Based on field notes and the video protocols, reading and writing were overwhelmingly the most frequent types of engagement and literacies used in these lessons. Students also looked for validation from the teacher concerning their choice of examples from the story and concerning various aspects of the quality of their writing. As a class they had worked consistently on developing strong theses statements, so this was an area where they looked for feedback to ensure they were meeting the level of quality expected from their writing.

Lacking from the data are examples of student engagement meeting the criteria outlined earlier for engagement from the Yup'ik perspective. There were a number of instances where students at each table would talk amongst themselves looking for examples, or work together to discuss how or why a specific event was an example of a

human rights violation as stated in the UN document. Aside from these instances of briefly sharing ideas with one another and looking for validation from one another this task was largely independent. Given the sedentary nature of writing, students were not physically active during these class periods. There was very little direct instruction, or instances where students were asked to listen en masse to an authority or expert. Students did ask many questions, which led to one-on-one conversations about their writing, but these conversations did not elicit the same level of focused listening discussed in the previous section.

Comparison of engagement using Yup'ik and Eurocentric literacies. In both tasks, the essay and the *yuraq* assignment, students were able to complete the assignment with high degrees of accuracy, and were able to demonstrate competency of the content they were taught. The high degree of accuracy and ability to demonstrate their knowledge through both tasks exemplifies the value of culturally relevant assessment discussed by Demmert Jr (2005) and Nelson-Barber and Trumbull (2007). However, the similarities in the way in which students were engaged beyond these academic successes were limited.

Engagement in the Yup'ik literacy task is best defined with the Yup'ik perspective of engagement. Students were actively working to complete the task using collaboration, physical activities, and focused listening. These elements of engagement were easily identifiable, and directly led to student success with the task. The students' use of Yup'ik engagement practices to complete a culturally, Yup'ik task was not surprising, and supported the idea that integrating local literacies can help students perform better and feel more successful (McKeough et al., 2008; Schneider, 2000). Writing was also noticeable throughout the first two lessons of the *yuraq* task. Students were composing a song, and

chose to write the lyrics out so all members of the group could see and revise them. This integration of writing may indicate the power that the dominant Discourse of the school, with a focus on the printed, had on the students (Gee, 2012). During a lesson that focused on Yup'ik literacies, students relied on the Discourse they knew from school, rather than risk confronting this norm by using their home Discourse. Reading was largely nonexistent in this task since they already knew the material they were discussing, and there was little need to reference any material in creating the song.

Engagement in the Eurocentric literacy task was evident in the students' participation through reading and writing. Students spent a majority of their time working independently to create an academic essay. This task did not lend itself well to collaboration or physical activity. Students remained, for the most part, in their seats throughout each of the four class periods. There was very little whole class discussion, and little dialogue between peers aside from a few questions and some off task behavior. While both tasks were successful in creating quality products, engagement in each appeared to differ quite dramatically based on the type of literacy students were asked to use to demonstrate their knowledge.

Flow and Deep Engagement

Student engagement can be defined and indexed in multiple ways. Marzano et al. (2011) identify student interest and perceived importance as two of the major factors that impact the level of engagement a student has with the lesson. To gather data on these factors, students were asked to respond to questions in their journals that asked about their level of enjoyment, feelings of success, perceived value in the lesson, and whether they felt like they had a purpose in the lesson. This data coupled with student accounts

from the debriefing session helped illuminate to what extent students felt a deeper level of engagement throughout the study.

In an ideal classroom, students would be able to reach optimal engagement, or what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls *flow*. This level of engagement occurs when one reaches that “sweet spot” where work is seemingly generated without effort. Students were asked to discuss their feelings deep engagement, or *flow*, after they wrote their essays, as well as during the debriefing discussion.

Engagement factors. Students recorded their thoughts on each lesson throughout the study. The questions were meant to illicit detailed responses; however, the typical response was a few words, and some students only provided one-word answers. The data were reviewed, and for each of the four categories: value, purpose, success, and enjoyment, the student results were tallied as either “yes”, “no”, or “kind of”.

Value. During the Eurocentric literacy lessons students reported a strong feeling of perceived value. In three of the four class periods a majority of the class reported feeling some sense of value in what they were doing. There were few comments associated with this section, but those that did expand on their answer identified the value as being practice for more essays that they would have to write in the future. This indicated an external motivator was providing the sense of perceived value the student had for these lessons. This factor also shows a sense of value placed on doing well in school. If students were not interested in performing well, they would not feel that writing essays provided them with any value.

Marzano et al. (2011)’s perceived value in the *yuraq* lessons was very high. In two of the lessons one student claimed to see little to no value in the lesson, and in one lesson

all students claimed to see value in the task. Students identified a desire to *yuraq* outside of school as a factor in seeing value. They also commented on the value this lesson had in preserving Yup'ik culture and language. This task is one of the few tasks they had done in school, outside of their Yugtun language class, in which using their Native language to present their knowledge was acceptable. Students also mentioned that this lesson was “a fun way to learn,” which one student claimed helped increase the perceived value of the lesson. Using Marzano et al. (2011)'s ‘interest’ as an element of engagement, it appeared that students found the *yuraq* lesson more interesting and enjoyable, which led to a deeper sense of value placed on the task.

Purpose. Students understanding the purpose behind a task can be a critical element for their engagement. During the essay lessons about half of the students reported feeling like they had a clear goal to accomplish each lesson. There were no lessons with more than a two-person difference between having a goal and not having a goal. Those students who did report feeling a purpose expressed external motivators such as a desire to avoid homework or to get a good grade on the assignment as the primary reason they felt they had purpose in the task. One comment that really stuck out to me was, “I felt like working today.” This student indicated that on days she felt like working she had a purpose, and on days when she did not feel like completing her assignments she felt no purpose. She was not specific about what changed between the lessons that created her desire to work for this class period.

While the value of the *yuraq* lessons was clearly more pronounced in student journal responses than the value they felt for the essay, the purpose behind the lessons was less clear. Students were split nearly in half on each lesson, and provided comments that

they “had no clear goal” multiple times. This task was one that had not been asked of them before, and many reported struggling with various aspects throughout the lessons. In many ways students were asked to design the task as they went through the process. Since they had not done this type of task in class before, and were asked to develop their own parameters for demonstrating their knowledge they were less comfortable with seeing the end goal while in the process, which limited their ability to see the purpose behind what they were attempting to accomplish during each class period.

Success. Aside from the first lesson of the essay task, students reported feeling successful with the task. This type of assignment, an academic essay, was very familiar to them. By 10th grade, students have written numerous essays for their various classes, so the process and expectations were clear to them at the onset of the task. They know what to do to be successful, and were able to use their previous skills to help them find success in this task. The introductory lesson when students were asked to complete a pre-writing graphic organizer did have a majority of students feeling unsuccessful. This was not surprising since locating the information to prove their theses was more challenging than writing out the ideas once they are formulated. Students seemed to feel more success, based on their journals, on days when they accomplished a greater quantity of work.

The success rate throughout the *yuraq* task fluctuated. Initially, students reported feeling highly successful when asked to develop the parameters of the *yuraq* project. This portion of the task lasted for nearly the entire class period, and when students were finished, we had a clear understanding of the requirements of the song. During the second class period students were asked to begin writing their songs. This lesson had a 5-4 split feeling slightly more successful than not. One student stated that he was, “unsure if we

were successful.” Without having prior experiences on which to base their progress, students were not certain how well they were doing with the task. This sense of uncertainty may well have led to the feelings of frustration expressed by some, and the lack of success they felt with the task on this day. Their third day of work on this task saw a resurgence of successful feelings as students began to complete their lyrics. As students were able to see progress on their projects, their feelings of success increased.

Enjoyment. It will not come as a surprise to many educators to find that students did not find much enjoyment in the task of writing an essay. Just over half of the students reported feeling enjoyment in the task on the final two days, and slightly less than half reported enjoyment in the first two days. Multiple students commented that the task was, “boring,” and one said he, “needed more attraction.” Comments from the last day of the task were more positive as students finished their essays. This may indicate a feeling of enjoyment was derived from the success they felt at completing a task.

Students were highly enthusiastic about the *yuraq* task on each day they worked on their songs. Each class period had one student report that this was not enjoyable. The topic, women’s rights, was one aspect that one student reported enjoying. One group, Group E, reported that the task “felt easy,” while one member of Group Y stated, “It was confusing but fun.” As each group worked through creating their projects there were many questions to one another as they attempted to determine how to best construct their song. It appeared at times that this task did create more struggles for students than the essay; however, journal data indicated that the struggle was not enough to overcome the satisfaction students felt while writing and performing their song.

Flow. To better identify instances where students had reached what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) called *flow* in their work, this concept was discussed during the debriefing session after the tasks were complete. I explained the basic definition of *flow* to the class as reaching that point during a task when work becomes fairly effortless and you lose track of time. I asked them what it felt like when they reached this mental state. Not surprisingly, many stated that they felt focused when they were working in *flow*. Students also discussed how they seemed to enjoy the task more when they reached this state. One student said he “doesn’t feel stress,” while another indicated that it was “slightly stressing.” The element of losing track of time came up twice, which would indicate a deep level of focus to the point where one is so immersed that time becomes irrelevant. These student remarks will be used to highlight times when students were able to reach a state of *flow* in their work.

At the completion of their essays, students were asked to respond to three questions in detail: What does it feel like to be engaged, What parts of this assignment kept you engaged, and What parts did not. During the essay portion of the study, students stated that the topic itself was engaging, so reading about women’s rights and finding examples in the novel were engaging topics. The process of writing was also a task that allowed some students to reach *flow*. One student was specific in that it was the writing itself, not the planning or editing that was engaging. He said he, “just got in a groove” when writing his essay. This student also finished the assignment a day earlier than his classmates, which indicated that he was able to put forth more consistent focus while in *flow*. Overwhelmingly, students commented that editing and revising was not an engaging activity, and they did not reach anywhere close to *flow* during these tasks. These students

do tend to struggle with grammar, which limits the feeling of success they find when editing a paper. The data seemed to indicate that most students did not really reach a level of engagement comparable to *flow* while writing the essay.

After the *yuraq* lessons, students were asked directly if they felt they reached *flow* during the process. Six students indicated they did, one did not, and two did not reply. When pressed to determine why they felt they were able to reach *flow* in this activity, the cultural connection was the most common reason provided. Students claimed to have felt more engaged because this was a task that they valued as young Yup'ik men and women. They also indicated that this was a fun task that provided enough challenge to make them work, but not so much that they were unsuccessful.

It would appear that the culturally relevant task was more successful in providing students an avenue to reach *flow*. However, this was not true for every student; at least one did not reach *flow* while completing the *yuraq* activity. Oddly, this student was one that did a lot of dance outside of the classroom, and identified as a strong Yugtun speaker. She was not specific in how this project limited her level of engagement. I had expected her to become more thoroughly engaged in this task, and based on the actual work that she did, she seemed to be fully participating each class period. One possible explanation, though I did not confirm this with her is that she felt that integrating her cultural practice into the school diminished the value of the activity. This division between what is observed and what the student is feeling is one aspect of studying engagement that creates difficulty in identifying and measuring the level to which students are engaged in a task.

Discourse Divide

Students who enter a school bring with them a host of identities for the various social situations in which they find themselves. Gee (2012) defines these identities as “Big D” Discourses, which are distinctive ways of saying, doing, and being that allow other members of the social group to recognize the person as a member. Often, for Indigenous students in a Eurocentric school, their home Discourse will be at odds with the Discourse the school requires to be successful. This study analyzed to what extent the students’ home Discourses entered the classroom during the task that integrated a local literacy from their home Discourse into the school.

Given the volume of elements that comprise a Discourse, a complete description is not feasible. This study focused on the elements of the Discourse that were evident through student engagement. From the Eurocentric perspective this Discourse required, “students [to attend] to the instructional activities occurring in the class (Marzano, 2007). In short, the Discourse of school required students to pay attention and attempt to participate in the lessons that were taught in the classroom. Students were expected to read, write, listen, and speak to one another about the topics that the teacher presented. Most tasks involved using Standard American English, independent work, and Eurocentric literacy skills: reading and writing.

The students participating in this study came to school with a very different Discourse than that of the Eurocentric school. Using the elements of Yup’ik engagement defined earlier as exemplars of engagement and communication in their home Discourse it was surmised that communication in their Discourse revolved around collaboration and orality. Children were expected to work together to solve problems, and directions were

given via modeling and verbal instruction. Written language was not a dominant aspect of home life for many of these students. The use of an Indigenous literacy that contains speech and physical action was designed as a means to encourage students to use more of their home Discourse in the classroom.

Observations. During the *yuraq* task students were prone to use elements of their home Discourse to accomplish their assignment. Students worked well collaboratively, and spent much of their time discussing their ideas. They did write the lyrics, but these were the result of long discussions about which topics and events they should include. Students also made use of physical activity as a means of engaging and working towards their goal. In terms of language use, there was a rise in the amount of Yugtun spoke during the *yuraq* lessons. Students were always encouraged to use Yugtun if it helped them understand or explain their ideas in my classroom; however, these lessons did seem to generate more instances of Yugtun use than in the Eurocentric lessons.

Ultimately, students were comfortable using Yup'ik engagement practices during the lessons that centered on a Yup'ik literacy, and were comfortable, though found less enjoyment, using Eurocentric engagement practices during Eurocentric literacy lessons. These students demonstrated the ability to function well in both Discourses, and as a result were able to adequately demonstrate their knowledge of *Things Fall Apart* using both literacies.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Discussion

This study began as a way for a teacher to examine two pedagogical methods with hopes of determining which better engaged the students. As the study progressed, it became clear that there was not going to be a reliable way to make a claim that favored one type of literacy over the other. There were simply too many factors that go into student engagement to determine if the type of literacy used in the task was the primary variable that caused any change in engagement levels. This drove the focus towards describing engagement, and attempting to determine, in specific ways, if students were engaged in the tasks, and how they felt about these tasks. There were also claims that were formulated concerning the integration of social literacies and culturally relevant teaching practices as tools of reflective feedback for me in the role of teacher in this study.

Engagement. Student engagement was the means by which this study examined the impact of integration culturally relevant literacies into the classroom. As discussed earlier, this study was not able to make a reliable claim as to the level of engagement, or make a value judgment as to which way of teaching elicited the most engagement from students. These ideas, while interesting to consider, require a much more detailed and lengthy study to control for the many variables that impact student engagement. What this study was able to demonstrate was that there was a cultural definition of engagement that differs from the one typically used in Eurocentric classrooms. The underlying trend in the data seemed to show that students applied the literacy skills necessary to engage in the culturally appropriate way in both the Yup'ik and Eurocentric tasks. While students were equally successful in both tasks in terms of displaying their knowledge, the data suggest

they gained more enjoyment and saw more value in the Yup'ik lesson. Marzano et al. (2011) labeled these aspects of engagement interest and perceived importance. The authors claimed if these two elements were high, students were more likely to be more fully engaged because they saw the long-term value in the task. The fact that these topics were stronger in the *yuraq* activity was not surprising given the impact CRT has shown in previous studies in both Indigenous schools and schools that serve other underserved groups (Augustine, 2008; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2010; V. Jones, 2012; Kawagley, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lipka et al., 2001; McKeough et al., 2008). This did not mean that there was enough evidence to make a general claim that *yuraq* is a more engaging assessment option than an essay; but as a classroom teacher I'm looking for ways to create that long-term value, even if the task does not increase their immediate engagement in the daily task.

The elements of engagement that indicated engagement by Yup'ik students in a Yup'ik task could be seen as off task behavior by a Eurocentric teacher. Having spent a number of years working with Yup'ik students, I had a pretty good sense of (though by no means expert knowledge) of how my students were responding to lessons on a daily basis. However, after reviewing the video protocols I found that on two occasions I corrected student behavior for what I interpreted as off-task talking. In fact, the students were collaborating by discussing which events from the novel they were going to incorporate in their essay. This clearly demonstrates what Castagno and Brayboy (2008); Gay (2002); Ladson-Billings (1995b); Nelson-Barber and Dull (1998) and Pewewardy and Hammer (2003) discuss in terms of ensuring teachers are well versed in the culture of their students. I felt that I was well versed in Yup'ik culture, had seven years experience teaching Yup'ik students, yet still made mistakes interpreting their behavior. This caused

quite a bit of reflection about how I may have been misinterpreting behavior in other instances, and reminded me of the importance of not becoming too comfortable with what I think I know. Working to be more observant and less hasty with correcting behavior, and working to help students better utilize their own ways of learning and engaging is an area that will become a focus in my classroom.

Local literacies. This project successfully integrated a local literacy that was substantially different from the Eurocentric view of literacy into a traditionally Eurocentric classroom. Students were able to utilize skills and knowledge they possessed that were typically unrelated to those skills they needed to be successful in school. In this respect, students were able to take the skills and literacies of a subordinate Discourse and apply them to an activity usually accomplished with the dominant Discourse of the school. This was an example of what Gee (2012) calls critical discourse and Street (1995) refers to as using literacy as a political action that rejects colonization. Students were effective in altering the figured world of the school to match that of their home (Gee, 2004, 2012, 2015b).

Multiple students commented that they liked that they were working with Yup'ik knowledge and *yuraq* in the classroom. Attempting to help students feel enjoyment in the learning process and feel valued for their cultural knowledge appears to have been successful. The knowledge about the content, women's rights in the novel *Things Fall Apart*, was demonstrated clearly and with enough detail using *yuraq* for me as their teacher to feel confident that they understood this aspect of the novel. This seems to support claims by Demmert Jr (2005); Hood (1998); Lee (1998) and Nelson-Barber and Trumbull (2007) that culturally responsive assessments are as effective as Eurocentric assessments

in allowing students to demonstrate mastery of a concept. As a teacher, my primary concern is that my students are growing in their knowledge, and in their ability to express and defend that knowledge. The successful integration of *yuraq* as a means of assessment ensures that I will be attempting to utilize a variety of literacies in my classroom in the future.

Culturally relevant teaching. Similarly to the ideas expressed concerning local literacies, students appeared to feel connection to the *yuraq* lesson and expressed more enjoyment in learning and working with this style of literacy compared to the essay task. This supports the underlying tenet of CRT that education should attempt to minimize the incongruities between school and home (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Gay, 2002, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995b, 1998). While student ratings of how fun a lesson is should not be the only mechanism by which to determine success, if students are feeling enjoyment and value in what they are doing they are more likely to put forth greater effort, which can lead to increased success (Crompton & Gregory, 2011; Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; King & McInerney, 2014; Marzano et al., 2011; Shernoff et al., 2003). Ultimately, if students are able to put forth more effort into a task they are more likely to grow that skill. As with any task, the more you work on a skill, the more likely you are to get better at it. If culturally relevant teaching practices can increase the feelings of success and joy a student has it seems as though the teacher should ensure that more tasks of this nature are integrated into the lessons.

This study also modeled how teachers of a different culture than their students can utilize the prior knowledge of their class as the primary authority on a topic. This helped to validate the students' knowledge and culture, which is another goal of CRT (Ladson-

Billings, 1995b, 1998). Increasing the feelings of success a student has in the classroom, and placing value on their cultural heritage encourages further participation (Villegas & Lucas, 2007) and future confidence in themselves as learners. This study was able to create a task in which students were the primary authorities on *yuraq*, and were able to utilize that knowledge and expertise to succeed in an academic task.

Validity

The results of this study had a high degree of democratic validity, or validity that has local relevance (Herr & Anderson, 2014) due to the close relationship between the school and study that was necessary for this study to be enacted. As a teacher-action research study the primary participants were my class and myself. A major purpose behind the study was to attempt to devise an alternative way to engage my students in their learning. Since the goal was to engage this particular group of students, the validity stems from being able to enact changes to better this class's educational environment.

This means that the results of this study are not generalizable to the broader population; however, the structure of the study, action research, and the goal, to determine what engagement is and how to elicit it in students, are transferrable. The ability for me to define what my students are doing when they are engaged in learning is important for me to be sure that I am reaching them. Other teachers likely feel the same, in that they want to ensure students are engaged in learning, so conducting a similar study integrating some aspect of the local culture from their area could easily be done.

Given the critical nature action research can take in terms of affecting professional practice and local change (Herr & Anderson, 2014; Johnson, 2012; Lapan, 2012), I believe this type of analysis was appropriate. As a reflective educator, this study gave me a lot to

ponder. Through this study I have become much more aware of what my students are doing in the classroom, and how many of the behaviors that may have seemed to be off task were actually engagement of a different sort. The benefits this study has provided me in being able to alter my professional practice create a level of validity as well.

Limitations

The duration of this study alone is a limitation to its reliability. The study was conducted over nine class periods with one class of students. Based on the data I was able to collect, and the data used in other studies on student engagement, there was nowhere near enough information for me to use to make any sort of definitive claim about the precise measure of how this study impacted student engagement. In order to make any claims about how local literacies increased or decreased student engagement, the study would need to be conducted over most of a school year to have the opportunity to observe many activities using the local literacy to learn about multiple concepts. This would help to minimize the likelihood that the students' feelings about the topic were not the driving force behind the level of engagement.

The inability to minimize or control for other variables of student engagement certainly limits the claims that can be made here. A student coming to school in a bad mood from an incident the night before will have very different engagement levels than they did the day before, even if the content or task are nearly identical. This happened with one young lady during this study. She came in upset and was unable to complete much work. She was frustrated at not being able to complete work by the end of the class period, and her responses in the student journals indicated she was not engaged in the lesson. While this is true, without the contextual knowledge of why she did not work, this instance

made the data appear to say that the task was less engaging than it may have been for her on a different day.

A third limitation of this study is the lack of transferability. These data are true for this group of students. Their actions are the foundation for the definition of engagement that was derived from this study. There is a distinct possibility that with another set of Yup'ik students doing the same activities a very different definition of engagement is possible. With certainty, there would be a difference in the levels of engagement that were seen and the level of *flow* attained by students. If moved outside of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, the results of this study are not transferrable to other classrooms in any meaningful way.

A final limitation of the study stems from the lack of participation from the community in the classroom. I made attempts to have community members come into the classroom to help teach the literacy skills to the students, but was unable to find anyone willing to assist me with this. This was a large limitation in terms of creating a study that involved community members in more than advisory and approval roles. I have thought about this frequently throughout the entire process, and believe one of two things may have happened, though I do not know with certainty about either. First, it is possible that there simply weren't a lot of people that *yuraq* in the community, and when the first person I had lined up was unavailable, there wasn't anyone else willing to come in. The second idea I had stems from the lack of community involvement at the outset of this study. Ultimately, this was an outsider's idea to integrate insider knowledge into an outsider setting in the community. Without the community involvement in the early design stages, there was not enough buy-in for people to want to help. Maybe the community doesn't see

the need for this study, and had I done more to determine what the community's needs and desires were earlier in the process, I may have been able to work on a study that actually had large amounts of community involvement. This is certainly an area that I wish to look deeper into should I continue conducting research studies.

Summary

The study was an interesting way for me to learn more about my students' learning habits, and their natural tendencies for learning. As a reflective practitioner, I was able to gain much better information about my students and about my practices in the classroom. This has led to some changes in the way I view what happens in my room, and how I choose to address student engagement. The integration of a local literacy was validating for these students. Multiple times they discussed how they enjoyed having something more Yup'ik in the classroom. The validation that students felt was a primary hope for me as I began to design the study. Their success and feeling that their home Discourse knowledge has value outside of the home was a positive benefit from this study. While my original intention to measure, and determine which literacy practice, Eurocentric or Yup'ik, elicited a greater degree of engagement was not feasible, the results of this study did benefit me professionally, and demonstrated the possibility of integrating local literacies and knowledge into the classroom to engage content that is not of the local culture.

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Appendix A: Unit Plan and Resources

***Things Fall Apart* Teaching Guide**

This set of lessons comes from a unit on *Things Fall Apart*. Prior to these lessons students will have read chapters 1-10 of the novel.

Lesson 1:

- Students will read the Declaration from the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
 - Have students work in small groups to read the articles and prepare to explain them to the class.
 - Students will be taking notes on these articles for their essay.
- Students will skim back through the first 10 chapters of the novel looking for examples of women's rights violations according to the Declaration.

Lesson 2:

- Students will continue their prewriting this class period finding examples from the text.
- Begin drafting a rough draft of the essay.

Lesson 3:

- Students will continue to write rough drafts.
- Revise and edit essays if the draft is finished today.

Lesson 4:

- Rough drafts should be nearly finished today.
- Peer edit and revise essays
- Work on final revisions and edits. Essay is due next class period.

Lesson 5:

- Submit essays
- Student journal responses concerning engagement in the task.

Lesson 6:

- Begin *yuraq* task today by watching video clips from You Tube of Byron Nicholai and other *yuraq* groups.
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tA5lNFcH0AM>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpVDwKxjTI0>
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=83IQZZEhA_0
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBbfXR5rBXY>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCJRnmOdIZg>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r05bz5yc3CY>
 - Students will be taking notes, mental or on paper, about the elements of *yuraq*.

- Discuss elements of *yuraq* based on the video clips. Students will generate the structural elements of *yuraq*, which becomes the requirements for their song.
 - Students should lead discussion.
- Assign the task, “create a *yuraq* song that demonstrates women’s rights violations in Umuofia”.

Lesson 7-8

- Students work in small groups to write and create the dance for their song.
 - Allow students freedom to choose language, events from text, and focus for song.
 - Students will utilize the text to come up with ideas that demonstrate women’s rights violations in Umuofia.

Lesson 9

- Present *yuraq* to class.

Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

Introduction

On 18 December 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. It entered into force as an international treaty on 3 September 1981 after the twentieth country had ratified it. By the tenth anniversary of the Convention in 1989, almost one hundred nations have agreed to be bound by its provisions.

The Convention was the culmination of more than thirty years of work by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, a body established in 1946 to monitor the situation of women and to promote women's rights. The Commission's work has been instrumental in bringing to light all the areas in which women are denied equality with men. These efforts for the advancement of women have resulted in several declarations and conventions, of which the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is the central and most comprehensive document.

Article 2

States Parties condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women and, to this end, undertake:

- (a) To embody the principle of the equality of men and women in their national constitutions or other appropriate legislation if not yet incorporated therein and to ensure, through law and other appropriate means, the practical realization of this principle;
- (b) To adopt appropriate legislative and other measures, including sanctions where appropriate, prohibiting all discrimination against women;
- (c) To establish legal protection of the rights of women on an equal basis with men and to ensure through competent national tribunals and other public institutions the effective protection of women against any act of discrimination;
- (d) To refrain from engaging in any act or practice of discrimination against women and to ensure that public authorities and institutions shall act in conformity with this obligation;
- (e) To take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise;
- (f) To take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women;
- (g) To repeal all national penal provisions which constitute discrimination against women.

Article 3

States Parties shall take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.

Article 5

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures:

(a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women;

(b) To ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of maternity as a social function and the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children, it being understood that the interest of the children is the primordial consideration in all cases.

Article 6

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women.

Article 7

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

(a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;

(b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;

(c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

Article 10

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

(a) The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training;

(b) Access to the same curricula, the same examinations, teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard and school premises and equipment of the same quality;

(c) The elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education by encouraging coeducation and other types of education which will help to achieve this aim and, in particular, by the revision of textbooks and school programmes and the adaptation of teaching methods;

(d) The same opportunities to benefit from scholarships and other study grants;

(e) The same opportunities for access to programmes of continuing education, including adult and functional literacy programmes, particularly those aimed at reducing, at the earliest possible time, any gap in education existing between men and women;

(f) The reduction of female student drop-out rates and the organization of programmes for girls and women who have left school prematurely;

(g) The same Opportunities to participate actively in sports and physical education;

(h) Access to specific educational information to help to ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning.

Article 11

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights, in particular:

- (a) The right to work as an inalienable right of all human beings;
- (b) The right to the same employment opportunities, including the application of the same criteria for selection in matters of employment;
- (c) The right to free choice of profession and employment, the right to promotion, job security and all benefits and conditions of service and the right to receive vocational training and retraining, including apprenticeships, advanced vocational training and recurrent training;
- (d) The right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value, as well as equality of treatment in the evaluation of the quality of work;
- (e) The right to social security, particularly in cases of retirement, unemployment, sickness, invalidity and old age and other incapacity to work, as well as the right to paid leave;
- (f) The right to protection of health and to safety in working conditions, including the safeguarding of the function of reproduction.

2. In order to prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of marriage or maternity and to ensure their effective right to work, States Parties shall take appropriate measures:

- (a) To prohibit, subject to the imposition of sanctions, dismissal on the grounds of pregnancy or of maternity leave and discrimination in dismissals on the basis of marital status;
- (b) To introduce maternity leave with pay or with comparable social benefits without loss of former employment, seniority or social allowances;
- (c) To encourage the provision of the necessary supporting social services to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities and participation in public life, in particular through promoting the establishment and development of a network of child-care facilities;
- (d) To provide special protection to women during pregnancy in types of work proved to be harmful to them.

3. Protective legislation relating to matters covered in this article shall be reviewed periodically in the light of scientific and technological knowledge and shall be revised, repealed or extended as necessary.

Article 12

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning.

2. Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph 1 of this article, States Parties shall ensure to women appropriate services in connection with pregnancy, confinement and the post-

natal period, granting free services where necessary, as well as adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation.

Article 16

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

- (a) The same right to enter into marriage;
- (b) The same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent;
- (c) The same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution;
- (d) The same rights and responsibilities as parents, irrespective of their marital status, in matters relating to their children; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;
- (e) The same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights;
- (f) The same rights and responsibilities with regard to guardianship, wardship, trusteeship and adoption of children, or similar institutions where these concepts exist in national legislation; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;
- (g) The same personal rights as husband and wife, including the right to choose a family name, a profession and an occupation;
- (h) The same rights for both spouses in respect of the ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property, whether free of charge or for a valuable consideration.

2. The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory.

Women's Rights in Umuofia Essay Assignment Sheet

Background:

Women's Rights are a major social and political issue in the world today. By many reports, women are the largest group of subjugated people on the planet (people who are discriminated against and oppressed). The United Nations has issued declarations that support equality, and in many countries women have gained rights, though these were not issued until the 1970s. Early 20th Century Igbo culture, the culture of Okonkwo, was extremely male dominated, and women did not have many rights.

Your task:

The Elders of Umuofia seek to change their customs to create a more equal society in which women are treated more equally. Provide them with reasons to make this change using *Things Fall Apart* and the *Declaration from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* to support your ideas. First, you must explain how Igbo society, in particular Okonkwo, mistreats women by providing examples of how his behavior, and that of others, violates the *Declaration*. You also must provide them with examples of how these changes could be implemented.

Details:

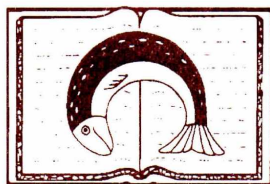
- You must submit your ideas to the Elders Council by Friday Feb. 19th. Pretend the Igbo had Google Drive, and share your ideas with me using Drive by the due date. I'll make sure they receive your suggestions.
- They are expecting 1-2 typed pages per person.
- They also expect that you will properly cite page numbers from the text with your examples.
- The use of an engaging thesis paragraph, solid transitions that lead them from one idea to the next, and a conclusion are also expected.
- If you are struggling to keep up with the pace the Elders demand, please see me BEFORE the due date for some help in getting back on track.

Appendix B: Video Protocol

Indicators of Engagement (to be checked if observed with evidence/examples)	Observed Examples
Engages in reading	
Engages in writing	
Engages in discussing text or other input with peers	
Engages in problem solving	
Creates products	
Engages in cooperative learning, peer tutoring, or other cooperative group structures	
Applies meta-cognitive strategies:	
Listening	
Physical response to input	
Questioning	
Responding to questions	

The size of cells was reduced to fit on one page. The actual height of rows was 2.5 inches, and column two was 5.5 inches wide.

Appendix C: LKSD Approval Letter



Lower
Kuskokwim
School
District

Office of the Superintendent
P.O. Box 305 • Bethel, Alaska 99559-0305
907 543-4810 FAX 907 543-4904

October 30, 2015

To Kipnuk ASB Members,

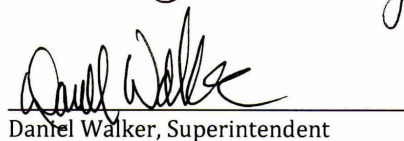
Michael Gehman, an LKSD teacher in Kipnuk, Alaska has received approval from the LKSD Board of Education at the September 25, 2015 Board Meeting to conduct research in the classroom, contingent upon Kipnuk ASB approval.

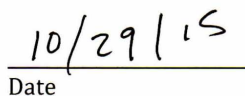
The purpose of conducting the classroom research is for research in Mr. Gehman's graduate studies, which the Board sees as a likely advantageous outcome for the District and students. The Classroom research will involve a select group of students at Chief Paul Memorial School and will include videotaping, based on parent permission to have their child participate in the study.

Please accept this letter to serve as your notice of approval by the LKSD Board of Education and Administration for Mr. Gehman's research at Chief Paul Memorial School in Kipnuk, Alaska.


Susan G. Murphy, Board President


Date


Daniel Walker, Superintendent


Date

Appendix D: IRB Approval Letter



(907) 474-7800
(907) 474-5444 fax
uaf-irb@alaska.edu
www.uaf.edu/irb

Institutional Review Board

909 N Koyukuk Dr. Suite 212, P.O. Box 757270, Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-7270

November 18, 2015

To: Maureen Hogan, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator
From: University of Alaska Fairbanks IRB
Re: [820136-2] Incorporating Indigenous Literacies in an Alaskan Public School

Thank you for submitting the Amendment/Modification referenced below. The submission was handled by Expedited Review under the requirements of 45 CFR 46.110, which identifies the categories of research eligible for expedited review.

Title:	Incorporating Indigenous Literacies in an Alaskan Public School
Received:	November 18, 2015
Expedited Category:	6 and 7
Action:	APPROVED
Effective Date:	November 18, 2015
Expiration Date:	November 18, 2016

This action is included on the December 2, 2015 IRB Agenda.

No changes may be made to this project without the prior review and approval of the IRB. This includes, but is not limited to, changes in research scope, research tools, consent documents, personnel, or record storage location.